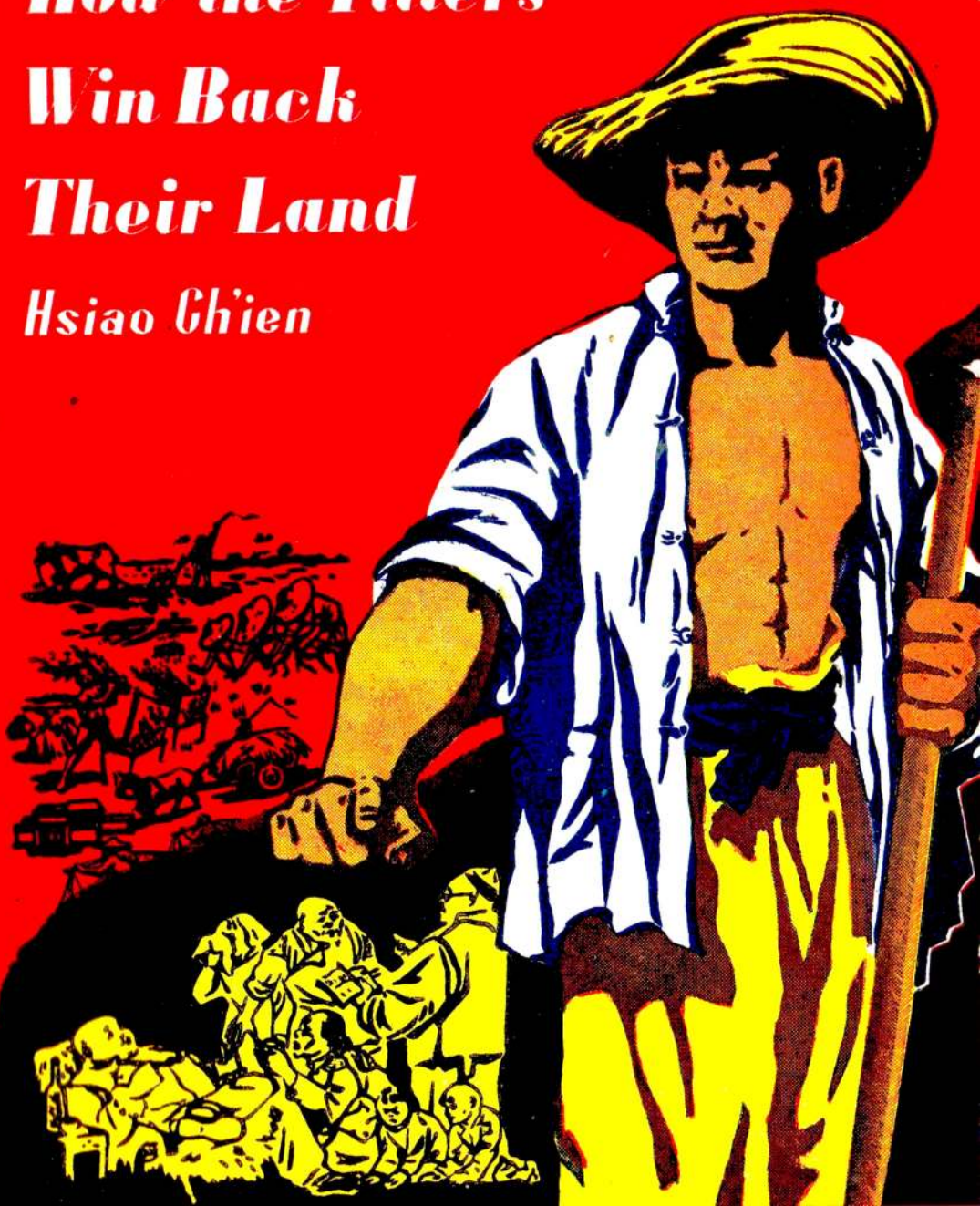


***How the Tillers
Win Back
Their Land
Hsiao Ghien***



Hsiao Ch'ien

**How the Tillers
Win Back Their Land**

**Illustrated with 11 drawings by CHIANG CHAO-HO
and 22 photographs**

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List of Characters

CHAO Chieh-min, head of the Land Reform Work Team in Huilung *hsiang*.

CHOU Jui-hsiang, proprietor of the Chien Hsiang Department Store.

CHUN-hsing (Li), daughter of Grandma Li, a child-bride who regained her freedom through the land reform; Militia member.

CHU Kuang-lin, often referred to as Uncle Kuang-lin, a tenant-middle-peasant.

CHU Yao-hsien, a rich peasant.

HSIUNG Peng, Secretary of the Communist Party, district branch.

HU Pin-tsan, a landlord who is concurrently a merchant.

KU Shih-ying, a pedlar.

KU Yu-chang, Chairman of the *hsiang* government.

Li Chao-chu, a landlord.

Li Chen-nan, worked as farmhand for Peng Yin-ting; Militia member.

Li, Grandma, a 53-year-old widow.

Li Ta-ming, worked as farmhand for Li Chao-chu; Militia member.

LIAO San, a carpenter.

LO Meng-hsiung, landlord Lo Pei-jung's nephew who tried to disperse his properties.

LO Pei-jung, convicted landlord.

LO Shu-min, leader of the Women's Small Group.

LO Yung-nien, poor peasant nephew of Lo Pei-jung.

PAN Chih-chao, Chairman of the Handicraft Workers' Union.

PENG Erh-hu (Tien Pao), convicted landlord.

PENG Fu-chuan, farmhand of Peng Erh-hu.

PENG Hsin-wu, head of the Small Group of Farmhands and Poor Peasants and later Chairman of the Village Peasants' Association.

PENG Hsin-wu, Mrs., wife of Hsin-wu.

PENG Kuo-chang, schoolmaster, son of a revolutionary martyr.

PENG Shu-min, aunt of Peng Kuo-chang.

PENG Yin-ting, a convicted landlord.

PENG Yu-tang, Chairman of Hsinlu Village.

SHAO Tsu-chang, Chairman of District Government.

TIEN Yi-che, son of a revolutionary martyr.

TSENG Kwang-wen, landlord.

TU Yu-chen, wife of a ferryman, served as wet-nurse in Chu Yao-hsien's house.

TU Yu-chun, Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce.

YEN Shu-cheng, Chairman of the *hsiang* Peasants' Association.

YU Feng-ching, Landlord Yu Tse-wen's henchman.

YU Tse-wen, Landlord convicted of sowing discord among the peasants.

YUEH Lien, served as maid in Peng Erh-hu's house; Militia member.

Preface

This is an eyewitness story of the land reform as it is now being completed in China's countryside.

Land reform is the fundamental step in uprooting feudalism, emancipating the long oppressed peasantry and industrialising China. Two hundred ninety million of China's agricultural population of 400 million had gone through the process of land reform by the spring of 1951. Incomplete figures to date show that 150 million *mou* (a *mou* is a sixteenth of a hectare) of land had been distributed to 80 million landless or land-poor peasants during the winter of 1950 and the spring of 1951. The major battle against feudal exploitation has been won.

This great movement was carried out by the peasants themselves, guided by 300,000 trained cadres of the Land Reform Work Teams. In the four Administrative Areas of East, Central-South, Northwest and Southwest China, the Peasants' Associations have a total membership of 84,600,000, of whom over 7,000,000 are members of the people's militia. The chains of feudalism have been struck off, and releasing the dynamic force of the peasants, land reform has transformed China from a famine-ridden country into a great rice exporter. This has been made possible only because the state power is based on popular support.

Friends abroad who have followed the historic changes in China naturally want to know how this victory has been won. Since the spring of 1950, three important documents on China's land reform have been published, namely, *The Agrarian Reform Law*, Liu Shao-chi's *On the Agrarian Reform* and the *Decisions Concerning the Differentiation of Class Status in the Countryside* (Foreign Languages Press). Every significant aspect of the great land reform movement, from its general principles to the most difficult technical part—differentiating the class status—has been authoritatively covered in detail in these documents.

For the lay reader, however, there seems still to be room for a descriptive account showing the actual process of the land reform in its various stages. The author of this reportage-novelette lived and worked with a Land Reform Work Team during January 1951 in a village in the northeastern corner of Hunan Province where Comrade Mao Tse-tung organised and led the peasant movement himself in 1927. Later he visited other districts where land reform had been completed two months earlier. Based on first-hand observation, the author has created this composite picture of the leading characters and the major events which took place. His main attempt, however, is not so much at the portrayal of the human drama involved as highlighting the land reform process itself.

An abridgement of this work appeared in serial form in *People's China*. This book is a revised and enlarged version of that serial.

"If you have established a revolutionary viewpoint and make a trip to the countryside, you will certainly feel an exhilaration never experienced before: Millions of slaves—peasants—are overthrowing their man-devouring enemies there. Their action is entirely correct, it is well done....All revolutionary comrades must realise that the nation's revolution requires a great change in the countryside. The Revolution of 1911 failed to bring about this change; hence, it failed. Now we have this change. This is an important factor in the completion of the revolution."

—MAO TSE-TUNG: *Report on the Peasant Movement in Hunan Province, 1927.*

* * *

"Agrarian reform is the necessary condition for the development of the nation's productive power and for its industrialisation. In all areas where agrarian reform has been carried out, the ownership of land acquired by the peasants shall be protected. In areas where agrarian reform has not been carried out, the peasant masses must be set in motion to establish peasant organisations and to put into effect the policy of 'land to the tiller' through such measures as the elimination of local bandits and despots, the reduction of rent and interest and the distribution of land."

—Article 27, *The Common Programme of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.*

* * *

"The land ownership system of feudal exploitation by the landlord class shall be abolished and the system of peasant land ownership shall be introduced in order to set free the rural productive forces, develop agricultural production and thus pave the way for New China's industrialisation."

—Article 1, *General Principle of The Agrarian Reform Law of the People's Republic of China.*

* * *

"The essential content of agrarian reform is the confiscation of land of the landlord class for distribution to the landless or land-poor peasants. Thus the landlords as a class in society are abolished and the land ownership system of feudal exploitation is transformed into a system of peasant land ownership. This is indeed the greatest and most thorough reform in thousands of years of Chinese history.....

"Agrarian reform is a systematic and fierce struggle. Our general line to be followed in future agrarian reform is that reliance should be placed on the poor peasants and farm labourers, while uniting with the middle peasants, neutralising the rich peasants in order to eliminate the feudal exploitation system step by step and with distinction and to develop agricultural production."

—LIU SHAO-CHI: *On the Agrarian Reform Law.*

* * *

"No exploiting class will voluntarily make its exit from the stage of history and the Chinese landlord class, which has a history of several thousand years, is no exception."

—CHOU EN-LAI: *Fight for the Consolidation and Development of the People's Victory, 1950.*

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CONTENTS

	PAGE
I. CHANGES ON THE HORIZON.....	1
II. ON THE THRESHOLD TO ACTION.....	23
III. OUT OF THEIR SORROWS, STRENGTH.....	41
IV. EXTRACTING THE POISONOUS SHAFT.....	63
V. RED, YELLOW AND WHITE.....	81
VI. SUNSHINE AFTER THE STORM.....	101
VII. THE FIRST TASTE OF HAPPINESS.....	125
<i>APPENDIX: 22 photographs showing the land reform in its various stages.</i>	

I

Changes on the Horizon

"Speed up the payment of the autumn tax and get ready for land reform." The call was sent forth by the Huilung *hsiang* Peasants' Association as early as the beginning of August. And yet the peasants of Hsinlu village, like many other Hunan peasants, were hesitant. They met the call to land reform with hope but also with some misgiving. Few of them were aware of the deep and startling significance the event would have for them and their children and grandchildren.

This is not to be wondered at. For thousands of years, feudal exploitation had drained away the life blood of the area. There had been little change in the peasants' life. Only in 1927. Freedom had shone then for a brief but glorious moment in the weeks of the People's Power. Then bitter darkness had descended again. Peasants under thirty had but dim memories of that time and the Chiang Kai-shek tyranny had not encouraged prattling, on the part of the old timers, about those dazzling days. They could still recall to mind the short-lived days of the peasants' triumph, but side by side was another mental picture—landlords re-instated and the fertile earth

around Huilung *hsiang* soaked with the blood of courageous peasants.

The seasons revolve like a wheel and the peasants in Hsinlu village followed, mechanically and unceasingly, toiling, toiling. Like wheels bearing a great load, they had groaned under the joint oppression of the Kuomintang (KMT) magistrate, the "gentlemen" of the *hsiang* Office, the *pao** heads and landlords who collected rent and practised usury with equal proficiency. The wheel turned. It was spring. The peasants must spread fertiliser, sow seeds and plant young shoots. Under the scorching summer sun they operated water wheels, weeded the fields and cut rice. Now the wheel had turned to autumn. With the fifth watch†, men got up to plough the fields and cultivate vegetables. At sunrise they were carting away the crop and sunning it. Bare-footed women, with suckling babes tied to their backs, went to the fields to gather hay as soon as they had finished preparing the meals.

Everybody in Hsinlu village agreed that the livelihood of the peasants had improved since liberation. Bandits had been exterminated and taxes lightened. What is more, local granaries were erected so that instead of having to carry your tax-grain over 70 *li*§ to town, now all one had to do was to deliver it to the Seventh Store-house near the Nunnery — a matter of only 20 *li*. The most important thing, however, was the way the "landlord-masters" drew in their horns. During the first half of the year, when, with the help of the govern-

* The tithing system of the Manchu regime in which every 10 families make a *chia* and every 10 *chia* a *pao*. The KMT also adopted this reactionary system. It made families within a *pao* responsible for each other's action and all responsible to the local Japanese or KMT officials.

† About three o'clock in the morning.

§ A *li* is slightly more than one third of a mile, about 633 yards.

ment, rents were reduced and deposits refunded†, the peasants had succeeded in making the big landlords part with some of their loot. Many of the peasants got back grain, and others ready cash. It was a breathing spell for all except the poorest farmhands who owned not one square inch of soil. Peasants who had been beggared used the money they got back to set up as stall keepers in town or to buy fresh land. So it was not unnatural that a new illusion should grow up among some of the peasants. Feeling the load which had accumulated on their backs for centuries somewhat lightened, they began to get complacent. "The landlord is already down. No need to kick him in the shins any more." Or: "the times have become better—so long as they keep steadily improving, there is no need to get worked up and act rashly." Unpleasant memories of 1927 troubled them, nagging at their subconscious mind like phantoms. They feared a sudden reversal.

As for the landlords, taking even such a small setback lying down was, of course, extremely distasteful to them. But they tried to act chastened and subdued. At Ch'ing Ming Festival* this year, for instance, none of the landlords thought it prudent to keep up the age-old tradition of giving the villagers a talk at the ancestral temple. In the old days, besides the talk, it was by no means uncommon for landlords to have recalcitrant farmhands put into sacks and beaten up as an example of the dangers of disobedience. Another established custom was for tenants to make gifts to their landlords, besides their annual rent, of vegetables, tea, beans or chickens. This year, however, the masters became unusually generous. "Save them for yourselves, please," they would say, with an ingratiat-

† Before the liberation, peasants renting land had to pay the landlords a deposit in advance which customarily amounted to a year's harvest yield.

* The traditional day for visiting the graves of the ancestors. It falls in early April.

ing smile. Some of the cunning ones even went so far as to hand out presents to their tenants and farmhands in order to seal up the mouths of their "kitchen-gods." Then again, since time immemorial, the tenant had had to ask the landlord to dinner. He took around a sedan-chair to fetch the landlord and considered himself lucky if the latter condescended to come. This year, the tables were turned, and a good many landlords tried to extend their hospitality to their tenants.

The landlords too had not forgotten 1927. History to them also seemed to go in cycles. They looked forward to the day when they would have a chance to hit back—hard. They were not sitting back and waiting for that day either. They were plotting for it, patiently, cunningly, relentlessly. . .

* * *

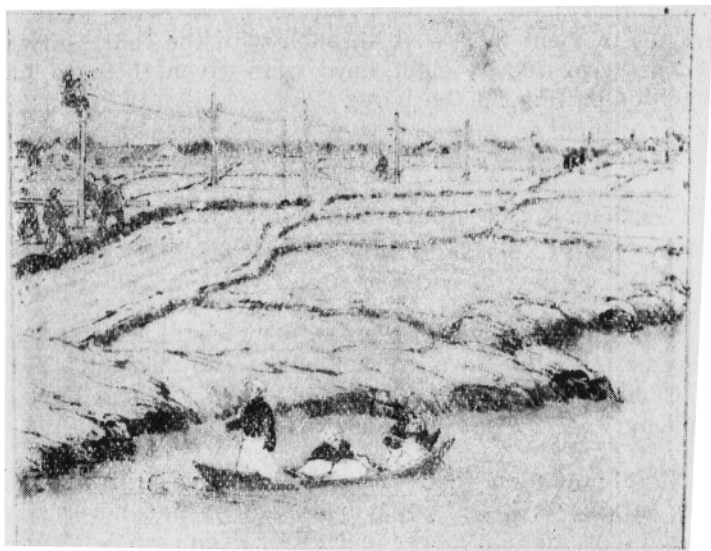
The first people to talk "land reform" directly to the villagers were some workers from the Telephone Company in town.

A little before the *Chung Yang* Festivals*, over the light brown field-paths of Hsinlu village, one began to see a new skyline. Along the northern boundary of the village, that is to say, on the opposite bank of the Pigeon River, which formed the line of demarcation between Huilung *hsiang* and Shihma *hsiang*, a series of telephone poles appeared against a background of yellow hill-slopes and floating clouds.

Then one morning early in November, a boat loaded with some 30 poles and four uniformed workers came drifting towards the south bank. Peng Fu-chuan, who was cutting firewood on the bank, stared at the boatman standing on the

*The 9th day of the 9th moon which is about mid-October in the solar calendar.

prow straining hard to steer the boat. Seeing the boat finally touch the bank, he could not contain himself any longer but ran down the slope and asked, "Shuang-chuan, Shuang-chuan, what are these people here for?"



The long line of telephone poles

One of the uniformed workers, with the characters "Telephone Company" sewed on his satchel, yelled before the ferryman had a chance to answer:

"What for? For land reform, that's what. Land reform is to make the peasants masters of the land."

This said, the worker called his companions to carry the poles on to the bank.

A vague notion presented itself to Peng Fu-chuan's brain—those telephone poles were intimately related with him and his welfare. Laying down his scythe and basket without thinking, he bent down and put one pole on his shoulder. As he was thus employed, the worker kept talking: how they would have to hurry; how the land reform Work Team would get there the moment they were through with the cadres-meeting in town. Apparently, eight days were given them to finish the job of putting up the wires.

"You four, that's all?" asked Peng Fu-chuan, concerned.

"No, four in one group," the worker told him. "Huiling *hsiang* has nine villages in all, right? Four times nine makes thirty-six."

Peng Fu-chuan was impressed. One could see this fellow had come from the town, so methodical and efficient. Yet he still could not help asking a final question, "Where does this telephone lead to?"

No idle question, that. True, he had been in town several times, turning in his crop-payment, but he had never stayed over ten days and had never touched or even seen a telephone.

"Why, to the District Government, to the local Land Reform Committee, to the Provincial Land Reform Committee. Right up to Chairman Mao himself."

The worker winked sympathetically at his peasant comrade and continued:

"All through the twenty years of the KMT, the telephone system was restricted to the town. Now we are here, in the country, and we want to help you to do away with the landlord class."

Peng Fu-chuan's head was in a whirl. When all the poles had been transferred to the bank and the workers were getting ready to start setting them up, he also picked up his scythe, slung his basket over his shoulder and ambled off. His way took him along the dyke and down another slope, and he was deep in thought.

When he had reached the foot of the slope named Seven Star, he lifted his head and gazed at the Peng-Chu Homestead, which rose above the bare tree-tops. The roof of Master Peng the Second's mansion was broad and spread out like those thick shoulders of its owner. All around on the outskirts were groups of dilapidated mud huts. Ever since he was six years old, Peng Fu-chuan had lived with his father in one of those huts. At times, he, too, hated Peng Erh-hu, Peng the Second Tiger, especially when he smelled the meals being prepared in the big house. Fish, meat and what not. And he, Peng Fu-chuan could only have strips of dried potato all the year round. Still, to Peng Fu-chuan, it was all a matter of "fate". "To have or have not depends solely on fate; no human effort can come to anything." Take the way his luck had turned two months ago. Out of the clear blue sky came an invitation from Master Peng the Second, who insisted on "presenting" him free a piece of land valued at five *tou** and seven *sheng*, and good, fertile land at that. Also he was asked to move into one of the tile-roofed rooms in the master's outer yard. Hu-m, his luck had certainly turned!

It came to Peng Fu-chuan like a shock that perhaps he should not have helped carry those poles after all, that he had

* *Tou* is one tenth of a *tan* (picul) which is 50 kilogrammes. Ten *sheng* make a *tou*. In Hunan, land is sometimes measured by the average yield, as around Changsha. In the locality where the events related here are set, it is measured according to the amount of seeds the land requires. One *tan* equals roughly 7 *mou*. A hectare is approximately 16 *mou*.

somehow betrayed his master. However he had acted in the past, thought Peng Fu-chuan, Master Peng the Second had certainly grown more enlightened since liberation. Without him, where else on earth could he, Peng Fu-chuan, get his food and clothing?

Most of the villages in Hunan are formed of several homesteads, each of which in turn is composed of one or more clans. In the small homesteads, as far as blood relationship goes, the members were usually three to five times removed from each other at the most. So, in a sense, each of these homesteads was a little feudal stronghold. In Hsinlu village there were three prominent homesteads: the Peng-Chu Homestead, "Big-house" Lo, and the Li Garden. Not far from the dyke, near the Seven Star Slope, was a one-street town.

When Peng Fu-chuan came back to the Peng-Chu House, he naturally told others about the affair of the telephone poles. The news passed around quickly and before noon all three homesteads had heard about it. Some of the old folk remained indifferent. But even they stepped up to the footstone in front of the Arch of Chastity and Filial Piety and leaning on their crutches, took a weary look. They had seen many new things: the Japanese; the KMT Army... The bitter experiences of many years told them: what is new is not necessarily well-meant.

The younger generation, however, could not repress their excitement. One by one, they bypassed the woods and the graveyard, and ran up the narrow field-path towards the river bank. Crazy Grandma, with bound feet, was also among the crowd. She was fifty-three. And there she was, with her crutch, caught in a sea of people, staring wide-mouthed at the poles standing upright this side of the bank.

The moment the peasants arrived on the spot, they began showering questions at the workers. Crazy Grandma, lightly

passing her bony fingers over one worker's arm, whispered, "Ah, you look exactly like my Teh-ming. Look, he was as tall as you are. I brought him up myself, from so high." There was a catch in her voice and soon she was sobbing.

"There, there, no tears! This is not a time for crying but for laughing," said the worker to Grandma. Then after scribbling something in a pad with his pencil, he announced, "No more questions, please. The telephone is put up for land reform. After land reform, up come you peasant comrades, and out go the landlords. Understand? Come, those who are strong, help us carry these!"

At this, all the peasants got to work. Some dug holes, others helped carry the already numbered poles. Especially in the matter of hole-digging, the peasants exhibited a thorough expertness which commanded great admiration from the workers. With the help of so many "extras," the job was finished ahead of time while the sun was still lingering over the western horizon. Slender shadows were cast by the poles right across the new-mown fields, forming a pattern, like a seal-impress, claiming ownership and authority.

* * *

Crazy Grandma also lived in Peng-Chu Homestead, and when she got back she pounded on all the doors and shouted at whoever opened, "Hey, land reform, land reform! My son Teh-ming must be coming back!"

Peng Hsin-wu's pregnant wife was just stepping out to call the pigs home when Crazy Grandma ran right into her and, quite befuddled, fell down. Alarmed for fear she might have got hurt, Mrs. Peng told her soldier husband to go and fetch Chun-hsing, Crazy Grandma's daughter. She helped the old lady up, led her into the room and sat her down on a stool.

She poured out some water for her and holding her hand, she said, as if explaining something to a child, "Grandma Li. Your son is not coming back. Didn't Hsin-wu tell you? He was telling the truth. Don't go on hoping like that. You won't be able to stand it."

"Not coming back!" Crazy Grandma repeated mechanically. Then with a piercing shriek she fell off the stool in swoon.

Neighbours came pouring in, all talking at the same time. Uncle Kuang-lin, fingering his thin beard, said musingly, "Better not mention to her any more this business of her son having died in the battle. Her daughter is getting married pretty soon, isn't she? What will happen to the poor old soul after that?"

At this point, Crazy Grandma's only daughter, Chun-hsing, still a child with pig-tails, broke upon the scene. Seeing the old lady's dusty, waxen pale face, she was distraught and wailed, "Mama, O Mama!" It was Peng Hsin-wu who lifted Crazy Grandma up in his arms and laid her down on the bed.

After a few moments Grandma's eyelids began to flutter. The first person she saw was her daughter. She took Chun-hsing's hand and, stroking it gently, said as if quite resigned, "Don't worry. Don't worry!" Then again in agony: "So your brother is gone," and lapsed into silence, hopeless with sorrow.

Although only seventeen, Chun-hsing had already been a child-bride for five years. Her "intended" was twenty-two, a son of the Lo family, thin as a rake and frequently visited by violent attacks of haemorrhage. Not long ago his family had proposed holding the wedding. At first, Crazy Grandma felt helpless about it. Hadn't she given out her daughter as

child-bride because she could not support her? And hadn't the others a perfect right to ask for a wedding after giving her board and lodging for five years?

But ever since Peng Hsin-wu came back from the army a year ago, he had taken an active interest in all the goings-on in the village. This ceaseless activity on his part more or less explained why he had been elected the head of the local Small Group.

He had been forcedly drafted into the KMT army together with Teh-ming, Crazy Grandma's son, and he knew Teh-ming was killed. Hence, upon hearing that Teh-ming's young sister was going to be married to a consumptive weakling, he took it upon himself to go over to Big House Lo in order to discuss calling the marriage off. The Lo family's airy answer was: "Sure, you can call it off, but not until you've paid us back the amount we've spent feeding her these last five years." There the matter had rested.

Anger surged in Peng Hsin-wu. He knew Teh-ming had been killed. "Grandma Li, Chun-hsing, just think of it," shouted Hsin-wu, his eyes ablaze, "Who was it that killed Teh-ming? Wasn't it that landlord son-of-a-turtle Peng Erh-hu? Didn't he send me off too as cannon fodder? Where would I be today if it were not for the Communists? They captured me, but they did not treat me as a prisoner. They saved me as though I were their own brother. Now I'm determined to have a showdown with Peng Erh-hu or I won't call myself a man!"

Peng Erh-hu. The name struck horror and hatred into the hearts of all the peasants. Peng the Second Tiger! When the Japanese were here, his brother Yin-ting, as the bogus village-elder, undertook to pressgang men and women for

them. After the defeat of Japan, Peng the Second Tiger stepped into his place. For four full years, he was the tyrant in Huilung *hsiang*, acting for Chiang Kai-shek, harassing the peasants with continuous demands for able-bodied men and various "contributions."

Liberation threw Peng Erh-hu out on his ears. For a while, supported by his contacts and henchmen, he tried to keep up his old prestige. Acting the part of a kind, easy-going superior, he would deliver threats like the following to the peasants in public: "Don't you get too active. We are settled, homely people. One should leave a margin in doing things so that there won't be any hard feelings in the future." For the last few months, however, he had started giving out presents to all the tenants and farmhands in his employ, past or present. Like a conjuror's cloak, his house disgorged numberless green American blankets and other "surplus material."

While Hsin-wu was loudly cursing Peng Erh-hu, the other peasants in the room only looked at each other and said nothing. Some thought: he had coughed up quite a lot at the "rent reduction and deposit refund," more or less withdrawn from local affairs and had in general acted in a pretty humble and penitent manner. Why bring up all the old scores? Some knew that Peng Erh-hu still had hidden small arms and a lot of henchmen. A word too much and something might happen to you. There was silence in the room.

Chu Yao-hsien, known locally as "The Scholar" was the first to put these thoughts into words. Before speaking, he cleared his throat in the manner of a fortune-teller; then he scratched at a scar on the back of his head. All this was in order to show that his statement was made with great care and deliberation.

"Huiling *hsiang* will soon have land reform," said he with an air of authority. This spring he had attended a meeting of peasant representatives in town and had come back with an exaggerated sense of self-importance. Ever since then, he had shown up on every important social occasion with a peasant representative's red silk insignia pinned on his breast, swaggering like an ox. "In land reform everybody gets what's coming to him. Chairman Mao is fair and impartial. There will be no mistake about it." A loud cough here, then, "Master Peng the First, Master Peng the Second, what does it matter? They are right here among us. They can't fly away. As for their land, it can't walk off either. So why get so excited? After all we're all men of the same homestead!"

The peasants, most of them already nervous and thinking of backing out, were easily persuaded by the scholar's words. Many of them now voiced the opinion that they should postpone settling accounts with Peng Erh-hu until the Work Team arrived.

Hsin-wu found himself standing alone. He realised that his anger had carried him away, so he did not press his point. He called to mind a passage from a speech he had heard several days before on "Work Preparatory to Land Reform" made by the Secretary of the District Communist-Party Branch. "You can't pull the landlords down until the masses are fully organised to act together. If you don't think you can pull them down, don't make any rash move and frighten them unnecessarily."

* * *

A mark of interrogation was planted in the heart of every peasant and every landlord in Hsinlu village with the planting of the telephone poles. The mark became bigger, nearer and clearer as one after another the poles were set up.

Since the Huilung *hsiang* government had its office in the ancestral temple of the Peng-Chu Homestead, and the village chairman of Hsinlu village, Peng Yu-tang was himself a member of the Peng-Chu Homestead, the telephone system, naturally centred there. The long line of erect telephone poles led towards that hamlet and everybody within, high or low, was in great excitement.

On the morning following the coming of the workers Peng Yu-tang called a meeting of the small-group leaders in the temple courtyard. Passing on instructions from the District People's Government, he said the land reform Work Team, would probably arrive around the 25th of November. In the meantime, a matter of more than ten days, they must devote themselves to dispelling rumours and combating any sabotage on the part of the landlords. They must redouble their vigilance and watch carefully every move the landlords made. At the same time no peasant should be blamed or attacked if he should hesitate to fight the landlords or should be deceived by them, because one cannot expect the peasants to wake up very fast after they had been oppressed and hoodwinked for thousands of years. Instead, one should employ all kinds of methods to rouse the masses' class consciousness. When that is done and the masses have really "stood up," then fighting the big racketeers, hunting down rumours and stopping the illegal activities of the landlords will all proceed smoothly.

The landlords, too, now saw that the coming land reform would destroy their power. It would not be as easy as the "rent reduction and deposit refund" campaign. They knew from the newspapers and booklets that the people wanted to destroy only the landlord class, not the landlords themselves; that not all their lands would be taken away from them so that they had no means of livelihood, but that they would get a similar share like everyone else. But, to the landlords, who

had ridden roughshod over the peasants for centuries, a "similar share" was treated with contempt. Used to reign supreme in the villages, they were determined not to take the coming blow lying down.

When he was told Peng Hsin-wu wanted to settle accounts with him, Peng the Second Tiger's face fell. His eyes bulging, he rapped the edge of the hard-wood table with his pipe and addressing himself to his concubine said, "Turtles and tortoises are kings today. And here am I, bitten by a mad dog."

Peng Erh-hu's study was very ornately furnished. Scrolls and paintings hung on the walls above boxes and boxes of old editions. Only one thing was missing. Below the wall-clock there used to hang a picture showing a group of people welcoming the arrival of the KMT army. If it had been there still, one would have discovered Peng Erh-hu sitting proudly beside the Divisional Commander of the KMT's 107th Division. Those days were past, but Peng Erh-hu still gloated over them with pleasure.

His hands clasped behind his back, he strode out of the study. In the big hall he paced to and fro, pondering. In the centre of the hall were his ancestral tablets, tracing his lineage back twenty generations. Then there were scrolls and tablets signed by "all the gentry of the district." On the main beam hung a horizontal piece with oversized characters: "A Precious Star Illumines This House."

Thoughtfully, Peng the Second Tiger gazed at the ancestral tablets as if asking his ancestors' advice to meet this new crisis. Stuck in the incense burner were a few incense sticks not yet burnt out. He rearranged them.

"Pang...Pang..." From the other side of the courtyard came the sound of someone monotonously knocking the "wooden fish".* It was Peng Erh-hu's wife, reciting the Buddhist sutras.

"The meal is ready, sir!" an anaemic-looking girl of about fifteen announced, standing outside the threshold.

Peng the Second Tiger gave an impatient grunt. Suddenly he raised his head and said, "Yueh-lien!" The girl turned around. "How would you say I've been treating you?"

Yueh-lien, already at the foot of the terrace, was slightly taken aback. She too had sensed a change in the atmosphere around the house. The other day while out shopping for Mrs. Peng at the Seven Star Slope, she had seen a lot of people, in groups of two or three, engaged in animated discussion around the well and on the field-paths. The walls were covered with slogans and picture-posters, with one showing a fat landlord sitting astride the back of a thin, under-nourished peasant. As for her, she had served Mrs. Peng for eight years. She had never stolen a needle or a piece of string. Yet she had to take beatings—both from Mrs. Peng and the younger concubine. Once in December, the concubine's baby had fallen off the bed and she was stripped naked and beaten. Compared with these two women, Master Peng the Second could well be said to be kind. A kick or two was the worst you got from him. Therefore she answered, "You have treated me all right, sir." But the words were accompanied by a brief glance at Peng the Second Tiger through eyes blood-shot from constant exposure to kitchen smoke. The verdict was too good for him and she gave it but reluctantly.

The Pengs did not all eat together. Peng the Second Tiger, his concubine and the baby had their meals in the study. After

* A hollow drum shaped like a fish used by Buddhists during their chants.

lunch, he broke his usual habit of taking a nap. He locked himself and the concubine in and the two of them started packing quietly.

This lasted until evening when Peng the Second Tiger stepped out of the study and made his way to his brother's house. On the way he passed his farmhand Peng Fu-chuan.

* * *

For the whole afternoon Fu-chuan had been pounding rice, and while he worked he turned over in his mind the perplexing problem: Is the master his enemy or benefactor after all? Hsin-wu had told him a lot of bad things about his master, but here he was, retained and treated with consideration when all the other four farmhands had been dismissed. Destroy Master Peng and where would he get another job as a farmhand? Who would feed him? Master Peng had made the point clear several times. "Land reform? Land reform means Communism. This year the landlords. Next the rich peasants. The year after the middle peasants. In five years' time everybody will be penniless. That's what it is." To tell the truth, the prospect did not strike Fu-chuan as so ominous. All he had was one cotton quilt, practically in rags—but wait. Yes, hadn't Master Peng "presented" him with a piece of land only last month? Well did he remember that evening—the way Master Peng dramatically pointed at the ancestral tablets in the hall and said, "We all belong to the Peng family. Let those who can help others. But no outsider is going to come and share our land!"

Seeing Fu-chuan pounding rice, Peng Erh-hu was displeased.

"Ah, stop it," he ordered. "Who knows to whom the rice will go?" This had been his constant attitude ever since

the day the telephone poles were put up. He once even told Fu-chuan to let the cattle eat just grass and not beans.

His hands behind his back, Peng the Second Tiger went on his way through a side-door in the west wall towards his brother Peng Yin-ting's house.

* * *

The Village Chairman and the small group leaders did their best to persuade the peasants not to listen to idle rumours and to get the autumn work done so as to clear the way for a successful land reform. Yet, in spite of their efforts the malicious rumours gained ground and the whole of Hsinlu village was in a state of great agitation.

Take Chou Hsiang-jui, for instance. He was the proprietor of Chien Hsiang Department Store on the street near the Seven Star Slope. Without a *sheng* of land to his name in the village, yet he confided to regular customers over the counter. "We're not going to buy in any more goods from Hsiangtan. Who knows who will be the victims in this land reform business?" Owners of groceries and herb stores also showed signs of uneasiness. Observant people reported that even the smoke rising from the chimneys of the brick-kilns was daily getting thinner.

No one knew for certain whether the rumours originated in the village and then passed on to the street or the other way round. Peasants going up to town with basketfuls of vegetables and eggs would be questioned in great detail by the merchants and after having got rid of their goods, come back in the evening with basketfuls of rumours. The Village Chairman was pestered with questions: Is it true that a married person won't get any land? Or must a person get married before he can be given any land? It got so that even peasants with tiny

bits of land worth only one or two *tou* began to get thoroughly nervous.

A woman named Tu Yu-chen had worked as a wet-nurse for the family of Chu Yao-hsien for three months while her husband was away. Then her mother-in-law suddenly showed up and insisted on her coming home. It seemed the mother-in-law was anxious since she had been told that after the land reform able-bodied women would be sent up to Manchuria.

It was at this anxious time that Peng Hsin-wu received a small package, probably thrown over the wall by someone. On opening it he found a note wrapped up in a ball of cotton: "One Peng doesn't want to hack off the head of another Peng. Let this be a warning to you not to throw your weight around too much."

Rumours buzzed and flew like mosquitoes and like mosquitoes were hard to squelch. The village activists tried to hunt the rumours down. The trail went from house to house, sometimes would lead right into another village. Some peasants were especially cautious. They refused to disclose the source of their information. "Don't know," they would say, shaking their heads or claimed they could no longer remember where they heard it from.

The *hsiang* Chairman called a meeting every other day to combat rumours. They wanted to get actual witnesses and evidence before they jailed any rumour makers. Several clues were gained at these meetings. The house of landlord Lo Pei-jung, in the "Big-house" Lo Homestead and that of the Peng brothers seemed to be the two main sources of rumours. Lo Pei-jung had called progressive members in his homestead "new-style racketeers." He had also whispered that the small-pox serum that the government brought from Hengyang

contained poison. Peng the Second Tiger had boldly torn off the poster put up by the Peasants' Association with the characters: "He Who Tills Shall Also Reap!" An old used bank note, with the characters "getting poorer with each land reform" crawled across it was found in the street. It was traced back to Hsieh Chang Store and there it was discovered to be a trick of Peng Yin-ting's.

On the morning of November 23, the Village Chairman and the leaders of the small-groups were discussing whether to hold the three rascals for questioning when Peng the Second Tiger's wife burst into the office. Her face was tear-stained. She stamped her feet and beat her breast in lamentation.

"Oh the scoundrel, the thief!" she cursed. "Ever since he took that wench, we've not spoken to each other. Last night the lights were on in his room for the whole night. We only found out what he had done when Yueh-lien went in to clear the room this morning. He has run off with that dirty little trollop and taken the suit-case which had my dowry in it too!"

Everybody immediately jumped to his feet. Hsin-wu especially was in such a rage that he wanted to start the chase at once.

The Village Chairman hurriedly phoned this news to the *hsiang* Chairman. Then he dispatched some cadres with Mrs. Peng to make an investigation of the house.

At noon the District Government phoned back ordering that both Lo Pei-jung and Peng Yin-ting be immediately arrested as rumour spreaders. The two criminal landlords with three small-group leaders as guards made their way along the field-path north of the Pigeon River towards the District Government. Hsin-wu, one of the three guards, carried a rifle.

They passed along the line of sentinel telephone poles. The early winter wind playing on the vibrating wires produced a sort of mellow and portentous music. It seemed to express the age-long sufferings of the peasants. Yet mingled in the complaint was a note of hope, a resonant twang singing of Huilung *hsiang's* fertile land and its hard-working inhabitants.

Two days more and the land reform Work Team would arrive in the village.

II

On the Threshold to Action

Though the Peng household's ancestral temple had only been built 90 years ago in the second year of *Tung Chih*, some of the yew trees which grew in a half circle in front of it were said to have a history of over 500 years. Yet it is certain that neither trees nor temple had ever witnessed a more significant event than that which took place on November 26, 1950.

It was an event that shattered the traditions enshrined in this fortress of feudal superstition. The people gathered in their hundreds on the open space in front of the stone temple steps for the first mass meeting of Huilung *hsiang's* land reform.

On the order of the *hsiang* government on the day before the Work Team's arrival, a platform had been built on the terrace of the temple and two national flags were draped over the imposing entrance. They hid completely the wide-eyed door gods, Chun Chung and Ching Teh, whose images decorated the two leaves of the gate, but incongruously, as if reminding the peasants of the past. There could be seen behind the platform the cruelly spiked railing that had been used by the landlords to prevent imprisoned peasants from escaping.

Framed by the flags was a picture of Chairman Mao Tse-tung. His thoughtful, kindly face smiled down at the peasants gathered on the ground below.

Two carved walls flanked the temple. One bore the inscription: "The Gate of Propitious Ceremony", the other "The Road to Righteousness". Now they bore signs indicating the seats of the Peasants' Association officers and the representatives of the Handicraft Workers' Union and the Chamber of Commerce.

On the jutting eaves of the temple roof, rows of gargoyles that appeared unconcerned, gazing with lifted heads at the wandering autumn clouds. The two stone lions guarding the temple entrance were less stoic. Their gaping mouths and bared teeth betrayed emotion, but it was hard to say whether a frown or a smile was intended.

The meeting was scheduled to start at ten. From early in the morning the representatives, one from every household of all the nine Huilung *hsiang* villages, had started for the *hsiang* government in Hsinlu village along the field-paths spread almost as bewilderingly and intricately as the nervous system of a human body. Some carried small paper flags bearing the characters "Welcome, Comrades of the Land Reform Work Team!" Representatives of the street near the Seven Star Slope arrived. Some of them had their heads stuffed full of doubts and problems. They engaged in whispered tête-a-tête or stood wordlessly by, their hands tucked in their sleeves.

A cheerful note was struck by the handicraft workers and pedlars from the street, who entered the meeting place in great jubilation beating side-drums. But, in general, there was an atmosphere of tension. It was, of course, natural that a person like Li Chao-chu from the Li Garden, a notorious landlord, should keep his hands in his sleeves and stand trembling in



Welcome to the Work Team Cadres

a corner by himself, like a prisoner awaiting the final verdict. But there was a section of the peasants who had been confused by the landlord's rumours and who, although they owned only a *sheng* or a half *tou* of land, were apprehensive at the thought of "redistribution on the spot" which, they had been whispered, might be the decision of the day's meeting. Hu Pin-tsan, who owned a department store on the street, ostentatiously put on a jacket that was almost in rags. Ever since the arrival of the Work Team, he had refused to show up behind the counter of his own store.

The "Scholar" Chu Yao-hsien was assailed by the most painful and complex emotions. This was a big event, and, to live up to it, he once more pinned on his gown the ever-faithful red silk insignia which had been given him when he once attended a meeting of peasant delegates. Now he jostled his way back and forth through the crowd with an air of solemn importance, as if he were presiding over the whole affair. Still, he could not get away from the fact that only a year ago he was known to have hired two farmhands and lent out money at usurious interest. He was dimly aware of the fact that this was not going to be anything like the "rent reduction and deposit refund" campaign. His uneasiness was not lessened when he learnt that the night before the Work Team had gathered together a number of peasants for a consultation which lasted till far into the night and he had not been invited. Outwardly he assumed an appropriately joyful expression. But deep down within him he was afraid and an unaccountable feeling of jealousy kept gnawing at his heart.

At quarter past ten, *hsiang* Chairman Ku Yu-chang, clad in a new blue-cloth jacket, took his place on the platform. Already there were the Secretary of the Communist Party, District Branch, Hsiung Peng, the chairman of the Handicraft Workers' Union, the Peasants' Association and the Chambers of Commerce, Headmaster Hsu Tzu-chiang of the primary school at the Seven Star Slope and some of the comrades of the Work Team. Ku Yu-chang called the meeting to order and the hum of discussion and gossip died down. He announced the three-fold purpose of the meeting: To welcome the Work Team comrades who had just arrived after half a month of anxious waiting on the part of all the peasants of Huilung *hsiang*; to hear the report on current affairs by Hsiung Peng, the District Party Secretary, so that a final end could be put to rumours and scandals; and to ask Comrade Chao Chieh-min

of the Work Team to explain the People's Government's policy on agrarian reform.

Hsiung Peng rose to his feet. A native of Hsiangyin and short in stature, he was ordinarily soft-spoken, but a booming voice seemed to come to him naturally when he spoke at a mass meeting.

"Peasant Comrades: We're going to carry out the land reform! All reforms bring something new and I know that it is only natural that we should have some distrust for new things with which we are at first not very familiar. In this case, however, distrust is neither necessary nor justified. But none should blame a peasant for such an attitude. For thousands of years a cruel and greedy feudal land ownership system has robbed you of your livelihood and of a chance to get an education. Now taking advantage of your inability to read the newspapers and get to know the People's Government policy better, the landlords are trying to deceive you, to disturb your peace of mind by spreading the most outrageous rumours, in order to prevent you from carrying out the land reform properly.

"I know that they are spreading the story that Chiang Kai-shek is coming back. But what a foolish thing to imagine! Comrades! The KMT that sucked our blood and stole our children for over 20 years was kicked into the sea by our People's Army over a year ago. We have wiped out that bandit army of eight million men. Now there is not one single KMT soldier left anywhere on our mainland from the Northeast to Hainan, from Shanghai to Sinkiang. Chiang Kai-shek with some of his henchmen are still on Taiwan, but who can doubt that their days are numbered? Would they dare come back on the mainland again? Then we will have the pleasure of finishing them off even more quickly!"

The peasants laughed. They remembered the sorry sight of the KMT army in retreat.

Hsiung Peng dealt in forthright terms with all the rumours that had spread around the countryside like a rash. He mentioned the one about the Americans rushing help to Chiang. But hadn't the Americans helped Chiang before? And the Americans themselves? Our people's volunteers and the Korean People's Army who had given the American imperialists a thorough beating in Korea could say exactly how much American aid to Chiang was worth!

"The landlords say that Chiang Kai-shek has returned to Hankow," continued Hsiung Peng, "but if he couldn't hold Nanking with eight million men how could he get to Hankow with his remnants now while his American friends are taking a beating in Korea?"

The peasants laughed again, for the logic was unassailable.

"Therefore, when we carry through this land reform, let us do it with a perfectly clear mind. The landlords, too, had better give up their idle dreams. Your Chiang Kai-shek has been kicked out never to return. Lay down your weapons and surrender to the people. It will be better for you. And you peasant comrades! Now that you are masters of the situation, what do you have to fear?"

The peasants thundered out their applause as Hsiung Peng sat down. Hsin-wu thrust his arm up and springing to his feet shouted vigorously: "Down with the feudal landlord class!" and the peasants in unison echoed his shout.

The few landlords in the crowds already felt isolated. These thoughts were hard to take. But they tried to clap their

hands too. Only somehow their palms just would not meet together.

Next came Comrade Chao of the Work Team. He sprang up with the litheness of a panther, a mature down-to-earth peasant cadre. He travelled much and travelled light. A fountain pen and a toothbrush showed above the breast pocket of his worn gray cadre's uniform. His face was deeply tanned and he had a scar on his forehead—a souvenir of the days of Japanese aggression. He had been wounded in a battle while serving as vice-magistrate in Wutai, the Shansi guerrilla area, when he was only 23 years old.

"Comrades! I am a native of Shansi. So, perhaps you will not understand everything I say. I'll try to say each word slowly and clearly. If you still cannot understand, well then, don't hesitate to ask questions later. My comrades of the Work Team and I are going to be around here to work for your full liberation with you everyday until the land reform in Huilung *hsiang* is completed. We'll try to make plain all the things that perhaps you cannot understand now.

"Peasant comrades! You have cultivated the land all your lives. It is clearer to you than to anyone else how necessary it is to give the land to the tiller. The feudal land system is cruel and outrageous beyond description. Those who tilled the land got nothing in return. Everything went to the landlord sitting idly and in luxury at home. Is it any wonder then that production was low? And prices high?

"Take cotton for instance, a thing very much needed in industry. Since we did not produce sufficient cotton, industry was not able to develop. And so cloth was expensive and we have always had to go in rags. The business of merchants and makers of cloth was not good because it had to depend only on a very small number of rich customers. After land reform.

with the peasants producing much more cotton, industry will prosper; so will traders because they will have the prosperous peasant masses as their customers."

Many a head in the crowd nodded assent.

"When one is struggling day and night to get just enough to eat, there is little time left to think about getting educated. Eighty per cent of our people are peasants and most of them are illiterate. They can never become truly and fully masters of the country if they still live under feudal exploitation. If we do not rid ourselves of the feudal land system, how could we think of building a really free, strong and prosperous country?

"This feudal land ownership lies at the root of our nation's troubles. It made us poor, backward and weak, an easy prey for the imperialists. Now that must all be ended forever.

"Ever since 1927 land reform has gone on in the liberated areas north and south of the Yangtse River. All the experience we gained during those 23 years as to what is the right way and what the wrong way is written down in the Agrarian Reform Law which our Central People's Government adopted this year. This is why we must follow the Agrarian Reform Law in our work of liberation. Land reform can justly be called an earth-shaking event. Those who formerly ruled in the countryside, the landlord class who have sat on the people's back for thousands of years, now must submit to the people's democratic dictatorship—the people's will. Those who were formerly ruled, the farmhands and the poor peasants, the most exploited groups, will now move up to the places of power. Land reform is aimed at bettering their life and raising their authority. That is what we mean by liberation.

"Everyone who supports land reform must, therefore, first learn to respect the peasants' opinions and consider their interests. The unity among farmhands, the poor and middle peasants, during and after the period of the land reform, is the best protection to the people's democratic dictatorship in the countryside. The farmhands and the poor peasants especially must be the backbone of the whole revolution in the countryside. They must stand up!

"Advance boldly! Mighty forces are backing you up—the workers, the Communist Party, the People's Army, the People's Government. All are ready to fight for you, ready to aid you! And Chairman Mao Tse-tung is leading you."

This much made clear, Chao Chien-min went on to describe various aspects of the land reform work on the basis of opinions that he and the village chairman and Peasants' Association officers had exchanged on the night before. He pointed out with special emphasis that People's Army men, dependents of revolutionary martyrs, workers, employees, professional people, pedlars and others who do not work in the fields but have other occupations, or those who lack labour power, shall not be classified as landlords if they rent out only small portions of land. He also explained from the point of view of the poor peasants why it is still necessary to preserve the rich peasant economy. This, he showed, would give a better start to the work of increasing production, protect better the interests of the middle peasants, isolate the landlord class, the main enemy, and thereby the land reform would proceed more smoothly.

He explained simply the nature of the new democratic revolution. Touching on how the free flow of goods between the city and the countryside would be advantageous to the peasants, he explained why industry and trade must be protected.

To those industrialists and merchants who were concurrently landlords he had this to say: Concentrate on developing your business in the city, and do not go on exploiting the peasants by monopolising land, houses or farm implements. He reminded them again: "In the past, landlords and rich peasants were your only customers. The landlord class occupies less than 10 per cent of the entire population. When the peasants really start buying you'll see which proves the bigger customer."



A Mass Meeting on Land Reform

To the landlords he spoke up again in a cold, determined voice. First he made it clear that landlords would be deprived of their feudal land holdings and abolished as a social class,

but they would not be physically molested. However, he gave the following warning:

"Two ways are open to you. One leads to a bright future and that is: repent and reform. Guard well your land, draught animals, farm implements, surplus foodstuffs and houses and hand over everything according to regulations when the moment for confiscation comes. Then the peasants will certainly treat you leniently. You'll be given a similar share of land and housing so that you too will have a chance to reform through actually taking part in labour.

"The other way is one which can only end badly for you. That is the way of Peng Yin-ting and Lo Pei-jung. They plotted and created disturbances. Now they are awaiting trial. Lordlords of this type can never escape from the people's long arm of justice...."

Before he stood up to speak, Chao Chieh-min had been somewhat uneasy about his Shansi accent. But he had been in Hunan ever since the summer of 1949 when he arrived together with the Liberation Army. His northern brogue had mellowed. Judging from the smiles on the faces of the peasants and the relief on the faces of the businessmen from the Seven Star Slope, undoubtedly the audience had grasped the essence of his speech.

The next to speak was Pan Chih-chao, Chairman of the Huilung *hsiang* Handicraft Workers' Union. The gist of his speech was that workers and peasants are comrades working for the same cause. The workers would lend whole-hearted support to the peasants in their struggle for freedom. Only when the peasants have been fully emancipated can a new China based on the union between workers and peasants be firmly established.

By profession, Pan Chih-chao was a blacksmith. He offered, by way of concrete help, to speed up the making of weapons for the militia during the land reform, and make more improved farm tools for the emancipated peasants.

Next came the turn of Yen Shu-cheng, Chairman of the Huilung *hsiang* Peasants' Association, who spoke on behalf of all the peasants. He called to them all to rise up in good order and in accordance with the policy and regulations laid down by the Central People's Government, take back from the feudal landlords the land they had tilled for so many centuries. Then he too stressed that the industrial and commercial enterprises run by the landlords and the land and other properties used directly by landlords for the operation of industries and trades should not be touched. •

Old Tu Yu-chun stood up. He was Chairman of the Chamber of Commerce and chief proprietor of the Kaikuo Herbalist Shop. To show proper regard for the occasion, he respectfully took off his horn-rimmed spectacles. Then he started to speak with a faint trace of embarrassment.

"During the last few days we people on the street have been unduly alarmed. That land reform means to help develop the rural economy is now perfectly clear, but some of us merchants insisted on getting the wind up. Some had even refused to buy in any more goods." At this, Chou Jui-hsiang of Chien Hsiang Department Store felt himself blushing so violently that his ears also turned red.

"What the other comrades have just said came to us as a great relief," he continued. "It was as though we merchants and industrialists were made to take some anti-toxin which neutralised the poison rankling inside us.

"I, too, felt some poison in me. I have a piece of irrigated land near the Big Graveyard, valued at seven *tou* and two *sheng*. Let me be honest. I got all my money by exploiting the labour of the peasants. My two sons are both doing revolutionary work in Changsha. In some way, this is a re-payment to the people. Did I not use the tainted money I got from the peasants to pay for their education? Since now the peasants are good enough not to touch my herbalist business, the greater part of my property, so that I can go on supporting a family of seven and contribute what little I can to the prosperity of Huilung *hsiang*, I in my turn will of course follow the law of the government too. Tomorrow morning I am going to turn over to the *hsiang* government the deeds of that piece of land together with a complete inventory of other property there and farm implements."

Tu Yu-chun's candid remark won him a prolonged burst of applause.

At noon the meeting came to an end. All along the field-path people went talking and debating, quite unlike the silent manner in which they had come.

Because he had not been allowed to get up and speak, the "Scholar" Chu Yao-hsien was feeling very much piqued. Mixing with the home-going crowd, he tried to crack jokes.

"One can see Comrade Chao is resourceful," he said. "Look at the way he extolled the people's long arm of justice by mentioning only Peng Yin-ting and Lo Pei-jung. But did he say anything about the one that had already wriggled out of legal punishment, namely, Peng the Second Tiger?"

This was overheard by Hsin-wu, who threw a scornful glance at him and said, "Don't you worry. We'll catch him sometime and then you'll see."

Comrade Chao Chieh-min, the leader of the Work Team, insisted on the Team finishing up all the meetings devoted to investigating the *hsiang* as a whole, within two days, so that the cadres could go out quickly to the individual villages and begin the actual work of land reform. These meetings would also serve to give the various circles in Huilung *hsiang* a clearer conception of the government's policy.

First came the meeting of cadres. Ten Work Team members sat in a row on a long bench underneath an ancient memorial tablet which said "The Roots Go Deep" and scribbled hurriedly in their notebooks while listening to *hsiang* Chairman Ku Yu-chang explaining the local set-up. They wrote:

"Human geography: Huilung *hsiang* has altogether 2,127 households, a population of 6,989. Nine villages. Created through the merging of the Fifth, Sixth and Seventh *pao* under the KMT regime. 1,527 *tan* of irrigated rice fields. 470 *tan* of dry land, largely planted with cotton. Land ownership quite concentrated, e.g., Lo Pei-jung of Big House Lo alone owns 90 *tan* of land.

"Hemmed in on three sides by rivers. Pigeon River to the north. Lienchiang to the west. Shaho to the south. All three empty into Lake Tungting. Frequent floods between spring and summer. Land near the rivers suffers most.

"History: This *hsiang* was under Japanese occupation during the War of Resistance and suffered a lot of damage. The whole street near the Seven Star Slope was burnt down. Many peasants killed.

"Political analysis: This *hsiang* was on the outskirts of the old Soviet zone during the Great Revolution. Hence the older peasants had considerable experience in organising. For

this reason, during the 22 years of the KMT regime, the landlords were particularly cruel. The *hsiang* has seven or eight despotic landlords. Worst of the lot are the two Pengs in Hsinlu village.

“‘The Circle’—a reactionary, superstitious society, has a good deal of influence locally. Membership in this *hsiang* reached around 560 at the time the Liberation Army crossed the Yangtse. About 80 per cent are deluded farmhands and poor peasants. But most of them had left the organisation when the ‘rent reduction and deposit refund’ campaign went into force. ‘Master’ of the Circle, Tan Ching-wu, of Shuang-feng village, plotted insurrection at beginning of year and was shot. The organisation itself still going on underground. Needs close watching.

“The current *hsiang* government was elected during the ‘rent reduction and deposit refund’ period and has four *hsiang* cadres. Among them, three are poor peasants or farmhands. One is a middle peasant. Among the nine village cadres, six are poor peasants or farmhands. Three are middle peasants.

“The whole *hsiang* has 46 Communist Party and New Democratic Youth League members. Party headquarters kept underground successfully after 1927. Since liberation, Party and League members have been very influential in all kinds of work—aiding the front, campaigning for the rent reduction etc., etc....e.g. Peng Hsin-wu of Hsinlu village has been consistently ahead of the others in struggling against reactionary elements ever since he was first won over.”

When the Chairman finished reporting, the members of the Work Team raised several questions. Among them was Comrade Lu Yang, who was assigned to go to Hsinlu village. A native of Liuyang county and originally a school-master, Comrade Lu came from a tenant-middle-peasant family and

had four months of training after the liberation of Hunan in the Construction Academy, a school in Hsiangtan for cadres. He had taken part in the rent reduction campaign and was considered competent. However, the prospect of having to tackle such a complex set-up as Hsinlu village disturbed him. Seven Star Slope with its shops and workshop was a complicating factor, and then "the most reactionary landlords" were Hsinlu village inhabitants. Hence he kept asking about this and that until finally Chao Chieh-min sensibly suggested: "Suppose we three, you and old Peng, the Village Chairman, and myself go into the problems connected with Hsinlu village some time later."

After supper the meeting went on under a brilliant gas lamp hung from the main beam of the temple. Chairman Yen of the Peasants' Association was reporting.

"The Huilung *hsiang* Peasants' Association," he said, "was first organised during the 'rent reduction and deposit refund' campaign. Therefore there is a relatively high percentage of middle peasants in it. However, no definite figures can be given until a final differentiation of class status has been made. The Association has three divisions, each comprising three villages, Hsinlu, Shihchiao and Yunhu, for instance, form the First Division. Total membership—957. But this is not a completely reliable guide to the degree of class consciousness of the peasants since many of the members only enrolled when Association officers went to their homes to canvass. Five hundred and thirty four of the members are men; 423 are women. At present the Association has 15 officers working. Eight of them are farmhands or poor peasants. Seven are middle peasants. You cadres must know our Association well because it is the mass organisation which enables the peasants to protect their own interests both during and after the land reform. We on our part will work in close contact with the Peasants' Representative Conference, the people's local government authority. It is

through our Association that the peasants heighten their own class-consciousness, develop the tradition of collective work and pooling of knowledge, so as to cope with the various kinds of constructive work. It is through the Conference that the peasants organise mutual help activities and co-operation to develop agriculture and improve their living standards. This is especially important work.

"Since the present Huilung *hsiang* Peasants' Association is the product of the 'rent reduction and deposit refund' campaign, a campaign carried out on a narrower mass basis, it cannot yet shoulder the responsibility of starting such a gigantic task as land reform. Therefore we must learn how to strengthen and expand it in the process of struggling, rid it of landlords and rich peasants or their agents who might have infiltrated into it, educate the politically backward elements and promote new active members from among the peasants."

* * *

Next morning even before the cadres had had time to wash their faces, people began to arrive. The meeting was a joint one held by the Work Team and local intellectuals. Chao Chieh-min explained the proper attitude which the intellectuals should have towards land reform and the government's policy towards the intellectuals as laid down in the Agrarian Reform Law. Then they began discussing how the Huilung *hsiang* intellectuals could best co-operate with the Work Team in helping the peasants to liberate themselves.

All the schoolmasters spoke. Some admitted that they had a landlord background but that in the course of political studies they had come to realise the justness and absolute necessity of land reform. Hence they were prepared to side resolutely with the peasants in abolishing the class to which they themselves had belonged. Some promised to take on the job of writing "blackboard newspapers" and making posters. Some said they would do propaganda work on current affairs. Others

agreed to help publicise what the Work Team was doing and its policies. Personnel from the Seven Star Slope Primary School offered to get up a dramatic group and use plays to educate the peasants. All promised to study the Agrarian Reform Law and the Documents on Rural Class Status Differentiation promulgated by the Central People's Government. Preparations were also made to open night schools in which the peasants would be taught how to distinguish between the different classes and the various groups of peasants, how to assess the various degrees of exploitation.

Lu Yang listened to the opinions which these schoolmasters expressed and then started putting in order the notes he had taken the night before. The report made by the Village Chairman seemed to him especially significant. In his notebook he listed the names of the peasants as nearly as could be judged according to their status, then the landlords. He starred the names of all those who were concurrently industrialists or merchants, and queried those who might be rich peasants or small land lessors. On another page he wrote out a whole list of names of people who were without doubt farmhands or poor peasants. Constantly in his mind was the instruction given by the Secretary of the County Committee of the Communist Party at a cadre meeting: "In searching activists, pick the ones who have always been the poorest, the most exploited and worked the hardest, and watch the landlords vigilantly."

Now the job before Lu Yang was perfectly plain. He must arouse and organise the poorest, the most exploited and at the same time the most hardworking peasants and watch closely the most stubborn, most reactionary and black-hearted landlords.

And he knew the two tasks were closely inter-linked. You cannot watch the landlords effectively unless the peasants have been awakened.

III

Out of Their Sorrows, Strength

With the escape of Peng Erh-hu and the arrest of his brother Peng Yin-ting, the Peng household, once the scene of never-ending bustle, immediately took on the mournful look of a deserted temple. Most of its twenty-odd rooms had been sealed up by the *hsiang* government. The one in which they had found a cache of weapons even had its door nailed shut. Throughout the enclosed courtyard resounded the monotonous syncopated music of the "wooden fish," with Peng Erh-hu's wife, her eyes closed, played the musician in a grey Buddhist garment. No wonder Yueh-lien, the servant girl, as she went about her household work had the feeling of living inside a coffin. Fu-chuan too felt lost.

Gongs and drums had been beating in the village for two or three days, and here were Fu-chuan and Yueh-lien, still squirming inside their "coffin". The change she had witnessed during the last few days seemed in Yueh-lien's mind merely to centre around this moral problem: Peng, the Second Master, was a heartless brute to have thus abandoned his wife. Peng Fu-chuan kept worrying about his five *tou* and seven

sheng of land which his master had given him as a 'gift'. Would that be divided up, too, in land reform?

On the evening of November 28, Fu-chuan had just come back from where he had been filling his water buckets when he found Comrade Lu of the Work Team waiting for him right there in the kitchen.

The thought immediately occurred to Fu-chuan—someone in uniform, making another arrest perhaps?

"How many buckets of water have you fetched, Fu-chuan?" asked Comrade Lu with a smile. He talked as though they were old friends, and his voice showed both intimacy and concern. Fu-chuan was still tense, but deep inside he had become a little less apprehensive.

"With only the three of us around these days, four or six buckets would do," said Fu-chuan, untying the rope around the buckets.

"Where do you have to go to get the water?" Here Comrade Lu helped Fu-chuan move the buckets and stood the pole up against the kitchen's blackened wall.

"Three *li* away at the reservoir. It's flowing water. Goes into the Lienchiang." With these words Fu-chuan became somewhat bolder. He lifted up his head and looked straight at the stranger. The light was quite dim and he blinked, eyeing Lu Yang up and down.

"Three *li*?" Lu Yang looked surprised. "How many buckets a day did you have to fetch before liberation?"

Before liberation? There were then four farmhands, one manager and cook, and a constant flow of guests. Divisional

commanders, colonels and what not. Usually over ten people. He distinctly remembered the number of dishes he had to help wash in the kitchen.

"Those were hard times. Fourteen or sometimes 16 buckets, two at a time, I had to fetch," sighed Fu-chuan. Then he thought he should make some boiling water, so he ladled some water into a cauldron and went and got an armful of firewood from a pile in the corner.

"That means seven or eight trips. Three *li* per trip," calculated Lu Yang. "So you had to cover over 20 *li* a day merely fetching water. Did you have other jobs as well?"

"Oh, lots!" That he should have so light a load now appeared to Fu-chuan almost a miracle. "I had to feed the pigs, feed the cattle, and feed a foreign-breed dog. I had to spread fertiliser and cultivate some land too."

"How much land did you have to work on?"

The crackling wood-fire in the oven cast a reddening glow on Fu-chuan's face. He stared dully at the leaping flame. By adding up individual pieces of land, he finally arrived at the total. "One *tan* and eight *tou* of land."

To Lu Yang, who had helped with various jobs in the fields but had never independently cultivated any land, one *tan* and eight *tou* of land sounded enormous for one man to look after. You have to plough it, fertilise it, and weed it before you can reap anything. Admiration mingled with sympathy as he gazed at Fu-chuan's thin, bony frame.

"Let's see," said Lu Yang, counting rapidly on his fingers. "That would produce around 70 piculs of grain, wouldn't it?"

"Only in a good year." Steam was rising from the cauldron now. Fu-chuan got a basin for himself and settled down to washing his feet. "But the river is not so obliging. In times of flood, you would consider yourself lucky if you could bring in 50 piculs."

"How much out of that did Peng Erh-hu give you?"

"Depending on the year," answered Fu-chuan, noisily washing. "Sometimes ten piculs. Sometimes seven or eight. I didn't begin to earn full wages until I was 20."

"Only ten piculs, did you say?" Indignant, Lu Yang climbed off the oven. "Tell me, in collecting rent, did he go according to the year too?" he asked sarcastically.

This question left Fu-chuan at a loss for words. Somehow the thought had never occurred to him.

"How long have you been working for him?" went on Lu Yang.

"I started out at six as a cow-herd." Bitter memories were surging up in his breast. "Then I began taking on other odds and ends. When I was 14, father died and I became a regular farmhand. I am now 24."

"You're 24," repeated Lu Yang. "You should get a wife."

"I have no special skill. How could I support her?" sighed Fu-chuan.

"No special skill?" said Lu Yang with disagreement. He propped one foot up on the edge of the oven and placed both hands on his hips. "You fetched 14 or 16 buckets of water a day, covered 20 li and fed cattle and pigs. You cultivated one

tan and eight tou of land with a yearly output of 60 or 70 piculs of grain. And you talk about not having any skill?"

"Well, no skill and no luck." He really had not been getting his due, thought Fu-chuan vaguely. "Take the Second Master. He could write and do arithmetic. So there he was eating and drinking his fill every year without even having to cross the threshold."

"Brother, you really are silly," exclaimed Lu Yang with a mixed feeling of bitterness and sympathy. He looked at Fu-chuan's legs, legs that had known so much hard labour, bespattered with mud, and here and there he could see blue veins throbbing. "It wasn't because of his skill or his 'luck,' as you put it. Land and feudal influence were what turned the trick. He had been exploiting you."

"Exploit?" The meaning of such a term was entirely lost on Fu-chuan.

"Yes, exploit. A mixture of open robbery and pocket picking," explained Lu Yang, accompanying his words with suitable gestures. "Now you, for example, turned out 70 piculs. He gave you only ten. That means he had exploited 60 piculs from you. You have worked for him 18 years. Say he gave you ten piculs every year (actually you often got less) and we still have the staggering sum of 1,080 piculs of grain—the amount he exploited from you."

"But," said Fu-chuan in a feeble voice, "the land was his."

"Indeed? Now tell me. How did he get his land in the first place?" Lu Yang and Fu-chuan stood up simultaneously at this point.

"The land was left behind by his grandfather. First Master and Second Master each got a portion." Fu-chuan was

trying to defend the Pengs, but he could not help feeling that perhaps he had not been treated right after all.

"And how did his grandfather get the land? Come, tell me." Lu Yang's voice now sounded almost as though it were edged with steel. The cross-examination was proving too much for Fu-chuan.



"He had been exploiting you"

"Well, his grandfather was a magistrate in the Manchu days," was all that Fu-chuan could answer.

"Right you are." The answer seemed to have furnished additional proof of Lu Yang's argument. "And all that a magistrate loved was to hear money clink. The money was squeezed from your grandfather by Peng Erh-hu's grandfather, and then used to buy land so that you in turn could be exploited!"

Fu-chuan was struck speechless. A cold wet towel seemed to have enveloped his brain. Leaning against the oven, he pondered over the problem and remained like this for a long, long time.

That evening Lu Yang returned with his quilt. Fu-chuan had willingly agreed to his staying there and the two of them spent the better part of the night in a heart-to-heart talk, lying side by side in a narrow bamboo bed.

Lu Yang was like Fu-chuan's elder brother now and to him he poured out everything. When Fu-chuan was six, his mother, already seven months with child, was ordered by Peng Erh-hu's wife to climb up a ladder to get some firewood from the attic. She slipped and fell and had a miscarriage. Death resulted after two days of acute suffering. His father, too, had come across some Japs while out carrying grain for Peng Erh-hu and they had killed him in cold blood on the dyke near the Seven Star Slope and taken the grain off him.

Into their conversation Fu-chuan adroitly introduced the question that had been bothering him. Will the land given by the landlord to a farmhand be divided?

"Dear younger brother," said Lu Yang, "don't tell me Peng Erh-hu had given you some land?"

"Yes, five *tou* and seven *sheng*," admitted Fu-chuan with complete honesty.

"Now suppose," continued Lu Yang, pushing up his quilt, "this quilt of mine originally belonged to you and I took it away from you by force. Would you be grateful if, knowing you are going to want it back, I just grabbed a handful of cotton padding from inside the quilt and said to you, 'Here, you have this.?'"

"Certainly not." Something which Peng Erh-hu had made him sign a few days ago fluttered through Fu-chuan's brain.

"Then," said Lu Yang, turning to Fu-chuan while propping himself up on an elbow, "Peng Erh-hu's land has long ago ceased to be his. It belongs to whoever tills it. What do you think land reform means? Doesn't it mean that peasants must have their land back for cultivation? You, Fu-chuan, among all the peasants, are most entitled to getting a piece of land, for you belong among the poorest, most exploited and hard-working. In dividing up land, it is people like you who do not own a strip of land that have priority. Five *tau* and seven *sheng*! It was yours to begin with, you silly mellow!"

Fu-chuan sat up at this.

"Oh, Peng Erh-hu, that son of a bitch," he cursed, almost in tears. "He's got me fooled. I must go and ask for it back." Forgetting that Peng Erh-hu was at large, he felt like putting on his clothes right away to find the swindler.

"Ask for what back?" asked Lu Yang with some curiosity.

"That piece of paper." For the first time, Fu-chuan felt the urge to confide in someone about it. "Peng Erh-hu gave me a deed of transaction—I didn't have to pay him, he said—but he also made me put my thumbprints to a statement saying that the land is to revert to him when Chiang Kai-shek comes back."

"Huh, that son-of-a-turtle!" Even Lu Yang was somewhat taken aback, but he pushed Fu-chuan down again and said reassuringly, "Don't you worry. Chiang Kai-shek will never come back. Still, it just goes to show what kind of stuff a landlord's heart is made of."

The next morning when Yueh-lien came to the kitchen to get some water, Fu-chuan told her the conversation of the night before and the two of them made an appointment to go to Hsin-wu's home together after supper.

* * *

That evening Hsin-wu's two dilapidated-looking rooms practically burst their joints on all sides. Crazy Grandma Li, Fu-chuan, Uncle Kuang-lin, over ten people crowded in. Yueh-lien was the last to join the throng. 'Scholar' Chu Yao-hsien, anxious as usual to be in the limelight, tried also to edge his way in when he heard Comrade Lu was calling a meeting. But he was stopped halfway by Hsin-wu, who said sharply and with sarcasm, "Today we want to discuss how to catch Peng Erh-hu alive. Come around again when we've caught him."

When everybody had come, the meeting began and Hsin-wu led the way.

"I was as good as stuffed in the cannon's mouth already by Peng Erh-hu," said Hsin-wu. "If it hadn't been for the Communists, I, too, would have been part of the ashes blown over the common burial ground. We started out having five *tau* of land. There were two sons in the house, my brother and I. Only two of us, but we got drafted three times. In 1938 my brother was one of the draftees. Peng Yin-ting was then Village Elder and he insisted on my brother's going. The *pao* head would come over every day to bring pressure upon

us. At night he would turn up again, with a different story: a little money might do too. So the long and short of the matter was we sold three *tau* of land for a little over 200 silver dollars and paid for someone to go in my brother's stead. While they were trying so to rope in my brother, Peng Erh-hu got me to work for him without pay. Otherwise, he said, he would tell his brother to come and pressgang me too. So I had to work for him for two months.

"Before long, however, it was again my brother's turn to go. The lot-drawing at the Village Office seemed to be under a magic charm. Only the poor got drawn. Big families nearby, like Lo Pei-jung, who had four big husky sons, were untouched. The three sons of Li Chao-chu never got drafted either, but Teh-ming, Crazy Grandma's only son, was among the first of the lots drawn. When 1945 came around, Peng Erh-hu became Village Elder. By then my family didn't have one *sheng* of land left; so that when I was drafted, there was nothing I could do. I was taken away tied with a piece of rope!

"Before I knew how to fire a gun, they put me into the KMT 75th Division and the first thing I knew I was sent to the front lines. Of course, I did not realise then the Communists were fighting for us peasants, but, still, it was difficult to get together enough strength to fight against people you had no grudge against! First time was at Tsinan. We retreated together with the army ahead of us without even firing a shot. Second time was at Mukden. That son-of-a-rabbit, the KMT commander Chen Cheng, threw us soldiers into the flames. A bullet got me in my side, here. (He pointed at his ribs.) It was summer then. For three days I huddled under a tree, as good as dead, and my wound was festering horribly. Luckily the KMT army quickly collapsed. Two Liberation Army orderlies found me and had me moved to a front hospital. There the bullet was dug out and my wound was cared for.

While I was at the hospital, they taught me to read and write and I began to understand why the revolution was good and the reactionaries were bad.

"When my wound was healed, I asked to be sent to the front lines again—this time to fight the KMT reactionaries! Lots of my old comrades had done so. They got a doctor to look me over and he said I was still unfit for front-line duty, because I had lost too much blood. So I did garrison duties in the rear. Later I asked to join the army that was going to liberate Hainan Island. But they looked me over again and finally decided to give me an honourable discharge to return to civilian life." Here he produced his veteran's certificate.

"There were other veterans like me on the train that left Peking. At all the stops along the way there were people meeting us. Before we left, each of us was given a pair of shoes and socks, a suit and money, equal to 500 catties of grain—according to the number of years you served in the army..."

Before Hsin-wu could finish what he had to say. Crazy Grandma burst out crying. If only Teh-ming could have come back too, with new shoes and socks and a new suit!

"I'm an old woman," she said amidst sobs, and lifted herself up with the aid of her crutch, "but I want to tell my sorrow too. I don't know yet where my son Teh-ming's bones are buried, but I know Peng Erh-hu is the one that's responsible. I had four daughters and two sons. Now only Chun-hsing is left. It wasn't because I didn't know how to bring up children that they died. Four of them died of hunger and cold. Once I didn't have a piece of cloth to wrap a baby up in. Neighbours lent me straw to cover the newly born.

"I hadn't been idle. I worked all the year round for the landlord and that was what I got—only misery! How could I remain strong when I never had enough to eat? Is it any wonder that my breast became loose and flabby, and that, one after another, the babies died off? The third one I throttled myself. Flesh of my flesh, how could I bear to speed it to an early death?" Here she began weeping loudly. "But that was better than to see it die by slow starvation. Finally all I saw near me was a son and a daughter, and the cursed Peng Erh-hu had to come and drag my Teh-ming away, my 19-year-old Teh-ming, whom I brought up with what little rice I could get begging from others! He went, leaving us two behind, mother and daughter, and he never came back..."

Crazy Grandma was sobbing convulsively. Hsin-wu's pregnant wife attempted to help her sit down and regain her breath. But no, she simply must go on.

"Never in all my life of 53 years did I have one day of happiness. Mother died when I was only two, and at eight I was given away as a child-bride. First I had to take a lot of beating from my mother-in-law. Then later on when I went to work for the landlord's family, the landlord's wife also beat me. For three months every year I lived on wild vegetables; for the second half of the year dried potato was the only food I knew. As for meat or fat, it had never been my good luck to even get a smell of them, year in and year out.

"After 20 years of hard labour, my husband and I saved up enough money to buy four *tou* of marshy land. My man, Li San, was straightforward and dependable but not very strong in health. One day during the hot season he was turning the landlord's water-wheel when he dropped down in a dead faint. The landlord acted as though such a thing was below his notice and I had to sell one *tou* of land to give him medical treatment.



Grandma Li wept aloud

"Then the Japs came. That opium fiend Peng Yin-ting was helping them to pressgang able-bodied men and he got the idea of having Li San carry bullets and dig trenches for them. One day for no known reason whatsoever he got badly beaten up, my Li San, he just managed to crawl home. His clothes were soaked through with blood. Later his wounds began to pus and he bled and bled. I sold another *tou* of land, but this time nothing could save him. Chun-hsing was only seven when he died. Giving Li San a decent burial cost me another *tou* of land.

"We two, mother and daughter, had a very hard time living on one *tou* of land. The next year, the harvest was late and we had to borrow from Lo Pei-jung—five *sheng* of rice and one *tou* of beans—just to tide us over. Two months later he told me that what I owed him together with interest was

20 times more than we borrowed. And so my last *tou* of land was seized from me.

"Chun-hsing followed me around begging for three whole years, we never knew where our next meal was to come from. Finally I could stand it no longer and gave her away as a child-bride. I too have been a child-bride. Surely I realised what it meant. Hsin-wu, I'm not a heartless person. I'm not crazy. It's just that I've suffered so much and there was no one I could tell it to before."

—

Lu Yang hurried over. "Grandma Li—don't anyone call her 'Crazy' Grandma any more—Grandma Li, certainly you're not crazy. See," Lu Yang began counting on his fingers for the benefit of the others, "as a child-bride, you were ill-treated. That means you suffered from living in a feudal family. Your husband was exploited by the landlord on the one hand and kicked around by foreign imperialism on the other. Two-fold suffering common to all of us peasants, also two of our chief enemies. Peng Yin-ting, Lo Pei-jung, they are now both under lock and key. We want to do the same thing to Peng Erh-hu and to all the other rascals. This is our job, and we must all help out. The government will surely back us up in this."

"Landlords are such fiends," said Tu Yu-chen, wiping away her tears. "They would come and snatch away your cauldron the moment they see your chimney smoking. My husband used to have a few *tou* of land to his name too. After my father-in-law died, Peng Erh-hu asserted brazenly that we owed him 80 silver dollars. If we didn't believe him, he said, we could go to the County Court and have a lawsuit. A lawsuit! With him who strutted in and out of the County Court as though it were his own kitchen! Naturally we didn't dare. Thus the few *tou* of land passed away from our hands."

"The year before liberation came, my husband was asked by Lo Pei-jung to help with the crop-threshing. The verbal understanding was each person must thresh three *tan* and five *tou* of grain a day and get paid daily one *tou*, two *sheng* of rice. The crop then had become quite dry and some of the grain stuck and didn't come off—not full-sized grain at that. Lo Pei-jung saw this and said nothing. When my husband asked to have his wages, he answered, 'You threshed 70 bundles. On each bundle was left unthreshed over two *ho* of grain. Two times 70 makes roughly one *tou* and five *sheng*, and you still want your wages? Haven't I been generous enough in not asking you to pay me the balance of three *sheng*?' Thus all my husband's strenuous work during those days came to nothing.

"My husband was so mad that he decided to quit being a peasant. Therefore off he went to Lake Tungting and found himself a job rowing boats. As for me, it fell to my lot to breastfeed someone else's baby while my own was yammering for more milk. My mother-in-law turned up a few days ago and insisted on sending me back to my own family, but I held firm. I don't know what the new government is like, but surely it couldn't be worse than the way the KMT bullied us."

When Tu Yu-chen finished talking, Lu Yang remarked that it was a good thing she did not go home, for she could stay and see with her own eyes what the People's Government was like. Far from bullying people, the new government considered stamping out those 'despots' who did bully others one of its main jobs.

"Am I not telling the truth?" Lu Yang asked, more or less rhetorically.

"Every word of it," all the people in the room, men, women, old folks and children exclaimed in one voice. Yueh-lien and Tu Yu-chen, the girl who worked as a wet-nurse in Chu Yao-hsien's house, both started crying. Tu Yu-chen had stayed for the meeting and hadn't gone home despite her mother-in-law's urging.

"But," continued Lu Yang, sensing that they were now with him, "it is up to you to rise up and see that justice is done. You know all the wicked landlords and you have in hand all the evidence of their past crimes. The government will not convict anybody wrongly. So all of you who have evidence that might come in useful should produce it."

Chu Kuang-lin, fingering his beard delicately, was the next one to speak up.

"I am old, so I have plenty of old scores to settle with Lo Pei-jung. I used to have a three-room hut of my own near Huangkuling, also three *tan* of marshy land which I rented from Hu Pin-tsan. That was in the year 1939. Then Hu suddenly took into his head to work up his business in town and sold part of his country property including my three *tan* of land to Lo Pei-jung. When the land changed hands, Hu Pin-tsan guaranteed that my tenancy wouldn't be touched for the next five years.

"Think of my surprise when, the moment the deal was completed, Lo Pei-jung called me over to his place and named three conditions, otherwise, he said he would 'have my hoe sawed in half' (take my land away). They were: one, a 30 per cent increase in rent; two, for three years I would not be allowed to go to cut firewood in his hills; and three, I must not keep fish in his pond. What spawn I'd planted I must immediately take out again. The blow practically stunned me, but I pulled myself together and begged him to loosen a bit.

I went on for a long time, but all he did was to pick his teeth leisurely and murmur this phrase taken from the classics. 'Those who find the terms unsuitable are at liberty to go!'

"I was so mad that I almost decided to have it out with him then and there. But, as my family and some neighbours pointed out, what can you expect to gain from such an unequal struggle? Is it sensible for a piece of bean-curd* to declare war on a knife?

"In the year 1942, Hunan had an especially bad case of locusts. So I prepared a banquet, roused up a few local people, with the intention of 'getting on the good side' of Lo Pei-jung, so that he might come down a bit in his rent. I had a very difficult time getting him to come in a sedan chair. And all that he said when he stepped off the chair was, 'Just as insects are bad for the tenants, so is drought for the landlord!' This said, he climbed up on the chair again and was carried away.

"When the KMT came back, their slogan sounded quite promising, '25 per cent rent reduction.' I was stupid enough to believe them. My, you should have seen the way he threatened to saw my hoe in half again. Of course, I had to pay the 25 per cent balance after all, and quick too.

"It would be impossible to tell you all the wrongs I suffered at his hands. I only rented some land from him, that's all. Yet the arrangement was such that I could hardly call my very life my own."

By this time Yueh-lien's eyes had become red and swollen from weeping. Lu Yang tried to get her to move over from where she was standing by the threshold and pour out her grievances too.

* Jellied soya beans resembling junket in substance.

"Go ahead, tell them how the Second Mistress used to beat you," said Fu-chuan, nudging her.

Her mouth clamped shut, Yueh-lien stared dully at Fu-chuan and the others. Tears kept trickling down her cheeks, and behind all the tears one could detect the beginning of flaming anger.

* * *

Similar accusation meetings went on for five evenings. Most of the people who turned up at the first ones were inhabitants of the Peng-Chu Homestead, but gradually the thing widened and took in people from other homesteads as well as from the street. Lu Yang made it a rule to say a few words by way of explanation and encouragement after each such gathering. The bitter, cold facts were eloquent proof to the peasants as to who had sweated in honest labour and who had been parasites.

One factor that came up again and again in the peasants' accusations was: "I can only blame my horoscope, which brought me bad luck." To show how false this was, Lu Yang cited the example of Comrade Chao Chieh-min of the Work Team.

"Old Chao was formerly a Shansi peasant. He, too, used to float around like an odd-jobber without a bit of land to his name and, of course, not knowing how to read or write. Ten years ago, after the Japanese devils had invaded North China, the Eighth Route Army, as the People's Liberation Army was then called, happened to pick him up while in Shansi. You all know the way the Eighth Route Army helped the poor wherever they went. So they taught him how to read, helped him realise how he'd been exploited and built him up to be a stubborn fighter against the landlord class. He was later elect-

ed as a Peasants' Association officer. He did his work well, rose to be Village Elder and then became Vice-Mayor of Wutai County.

"Look at him today. He can now read, write, make speeches and do administrative work. His family has been allotted some land and he's out here to work for the people. Don't tell me all this is because of 'fate'! If he had resigned himself to being what he was, then he would truly have been a victim of the fortune-teller's nonsense!"

Thus the Hsinlu Village Small Group of Farmhands and Poor Peasants was set up, and Hsin-wu was elected head of the group.

The following afternoon all the men brought along their mothers and wives, and the women, their mothers-in-law and sisters-in-law. That was an idea of Lu Yang's. It certainly did not appeal to some of the mothers-in-law, who looked reluctant and apprehensive.

The meeting opened with the accusations made by Grandma Li, Tu Yu-chen and Mrs. Peng Hsin-wu. Even Yueh-lien found her voice. She explained how she had been taken away from her parents by force, since her family owed Peng Erh-hu two piculs of grain. Her tearful account of the way the two Peng women maltreated her caused many of her listeners to weep in sympathy.

The wife of handicraftsman Hsu Tsung-lien stood up and told how her mother-in-law had made life miserable for her. Lu Yang waited till she finished, then made the following comment:

"The bickerings among ourselves, who all belong to the peasant class, are not to be confused with the oppression by

the landlords. For thousands of years, the landlords have been persistently squeezing us. There hasn't been a single exception. Therefore, the landlords, as a class, must be overthrown. As for members in a family, there are bound to be some who are good-tempered and some who are bad-tempered. Most of us, however, become irritable because we have to contend with such a difficult life, owing to the landlords' exploitation. Bickerings and squabbings naturally arise when people don't know where their next meal is to come from.

"Wait till the land is properly divided, till nobody has to suffer from hunger any more and all men and women have learned how to read, and then see. I'm convinced the relationship between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law will become infinitely better, and so will the relationship between husbands and wives. We must all realise that the old land system is at the root of all disrupted homes. When land reform is put into practice, not only will the peasants be richer, but their family life will also be more harmonious."

All the women—mothers-in-law in particular—were deeply impressed by these words. Lu continued:

"The point, therefore, is that women as well as men must take part in the struggle to overthrow the landlord class. Not only because women as well as men are entitled to their share of land in land distribution, but because women constitute half of this world. Without women, the landlord class couldn't be pulled down, and until they have been pulled down, no peasant, man or woman, can breathe freely."

After holding similar sessions two or three times, the Hsin-lu village women also organised a small group of their own, with Lo Shu-min, an activist in the Big-House Lo, as the leader.

One day, at the end of a meeting, when all the women were going home, Yueh-lien elbowed her way through the

crowd and came up to Lu Yang. Pulling at his sleeve to attract his attention she said, "Look at this, Comrade Lu," and produced a neatly folded letter which had been tucked away inside her clothing. She handed it over with the mumbled explanation that "It had just been delivered, the Mistress hadn't seen it yet" and that "it was all Fu-chuan's idea."

Lu Yang was completely at a loss as to what it was all about. He looked at the envelope, which said, "Kindly deliver this to my wife," and also noted that, instead of putting his name on the envelope as was the usual practice, the writer had merely put, "Read what's inside." He broke open the envelope and drew out a piece of paper, on which were scrawled these words:

"I'm now staying with Uncle Yun in town. Everything is fine. Don't worry."

The signature read: "By some one you know."

Lu Yang had a sudden brainwave. Peng Erh-hu, of course! Who else could it be?

Without delay, Lu Yang sent a message to Fu-chuan to come to the temple.

"Do you know if Peng Erh-hu has an Uncle Yun in town?" Lu asked. Thinking over the question, Fu-chuan suddenly remembered that once when he had to go to town to turn in Peng Erh-hu's crop payment, he had been told to take a couple of chickens and a bundle of bamboo shoots to an uncle of Peng Erh-hu's in town. The place was somewhere near the railway station, he remembered, not far from Wanshou Bridge.

"Good, get ready," said Lu Yang to Fu-chuan. "You may be sent to town, this time without your pole and baskets, but when you return, don't forget to bring back Peng Erh-hu alive."

IV

Extracting the Poisonous Shaft

When he saw that the organisation of farmhands and poor peasants had thus got underway, Chu Yao-hsien, whom a preliminary investigation revealed to be a rich peasant, grew bitter. He would say with a wry smile, "Wasn't I the one who had to go up to town to see to the autumn taxation business? Those illiterate bumpkins, what do they know besides pounding mud-cakes?" The insinuation was perfectly clear—land reform could not succeed without him. When this reached the ears of the farmhands and poor peasants, they were naturally indignant.

Tu Yu-chen, who was working as a wet-nurse in the Chu family, said, "He saw to the autumn taxation, did he? He was a representative, but he cheated by not reporting the five *tou* of land he had on the river bank and paid three or four piculs less grain tax than he should. He certainly has got nerve, still swaggering about the way he does!"

With the memory still fresh in their minds of how Chu Yao-hsien used to harp on "supporting the People's Government," the whole group got furious. Some said he should be arrested at once.

"Don't let us forget that Peng Erh-hu, and not he, is the man we want," Lu Yang pointed out. "Chu Yao-hsien is sore simply because he wants to find an outlet for his own petty jealousies. If he should actually do anything to undermine our land reform, like spreading rumours or dispersing properties, then we would certainly arrest him."

Two problems were taken up in the Small Group that evening: the organisation of a people's militia and closer unity with the middle peasants to enlarge the ranks for struggling against the landlords.

Around 30 people had registered to join the people's militia during the last few days. Those who were under 18 or over 30 had to be turned down. According to regulations, people between 30 and 60 are only allowed to join the militia after the completion of land reform. This is because during land reform a militia man has quite a strenuous job, requiring physical strength and endurance.

Following the establishment of the Small Group of Farmhands and Poor Peasants, a number of middle peasants, who had shown courage in unmasking the landlords' schemes, had also been drawn into the struggle. At first this had given rise to some misunderstanding on the part of a few poor peasants who feared the drawing in of new members would mean cutting down their future share of land.

Lu Yang, however, made it clear to them that land distribution is not the sole aim of land reform, and that political emancipation, with the complete overthrow of the landlord class, is equally important for the peasants. To achieve this, farmhands and poor peasants must join hands with the middle peasants and work at it together, with the former as the backbone.

But in this united front, a rich peasant like Chu Yao-hsien still could not be allowed a foothold in the Peasants' Association. The sight of more and more middle peasants joining the Association while he himself was excluded further tormented him. He began to act queerly.

For instance, in ordering his wife to prepare something good for him to eat, he said:

"In times like these, it would be downright foolish not to eat all that one can get hold of. After all, who knows when the Third World War might be here and the atom bombs dropped!"

Little did he know that someone quite nearby had already made giant strides in her political awakening. Tu Yu-chen was breastfeeding the baby when her ears caught that remark and she spoke up with some vehemence, "It's wrong to say things like that!"

"How do you mean, wrong?" Chu Yao-hsien really didn't know what the world was coming to. Imagine Tu Yu-chen using that tone to him.

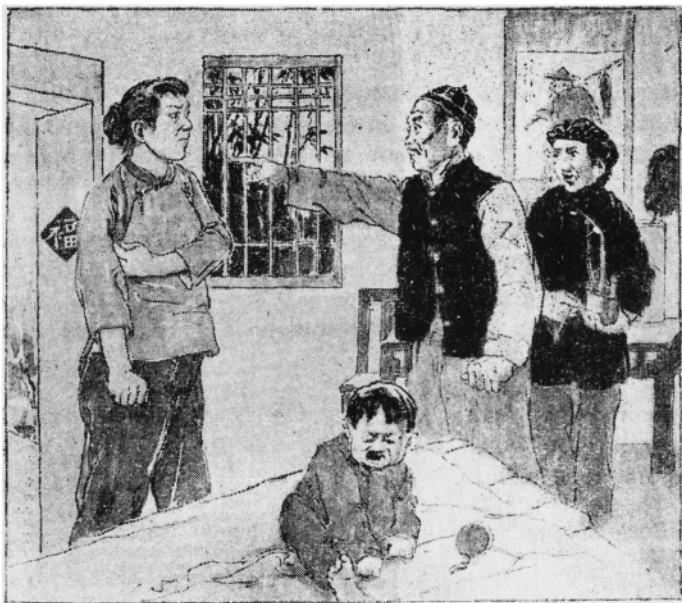
"Because you're making up rumours!" Yu-chen pointed out sternly.

The way Chu Yao-hsien reasoned out the matter was like this: You, Tu Yu-chen, are paid and fed by me and you dare to accuse me of rumour-manufacturing. All right, out you go!

Buttoning up her jacket, Yu-chen left without a word. She knew whom she wanted to find: Hsin-wu and Lu Yang.

The next morning, Fu-chuan and the Secretary of the *hsiang* Peasants' Association went up to town together. They

had an official letter with them made out by the Huilung *hsiang* government and addressed to the Bureau of Public Security in town, introducing them and explaining what their mission in town was. There was another letter, a letter of accusation, signed by the *hsiang* Peasants' Association, in which landlord



Tu Yu-chen left without a word

Peng Erh-hu's crimes were enumerated. It closed with this sentence, "We peasants want to appeal to the Bureau of Public Security to see that justice is carried out."

Soon after Fu-chuan and his companion left, Hsin-wu, together with two militia members, set out to arrest Chu Yao-hsien and escort him to the District Government. Return-

ing in the afternoon around two o'clock, Hsin-wu made the following report to the *hsiang* chairman. "I told the District Officer of Chu Yao-hsien's suspicious conduct, how he spread rumours about land reform and disturbed us peasants. 'Please keep an eye on him for us,' I said, 'and don't let anyone bail him out without our consent.'"

Chu Yao-hsien's wife got really frantic. Finally she got eight "high-class gentlefolk" of the village to write out a petition for her. The letter was duly written, but someone would have to deliver it in person to the District Government. This unpleasant duty all the guarantors declined to perform. In the end it was the fiftyish Lo Chao-jen who volunteered his service.

Well, he went and came back, and Chu Yao-hsien was still not with him. Sadly shaking his head, he said to Chu Yao-hsien's wife, "*Ta Sao* (big sister-in-law), a guarantor has to have certain qualifications. You'd better strike my name off from the list. I don't have those qualifications. I used to lend out bits of money from time to time and the interest rate was apparently a little too high. I don't know yet what the peasants will do to me!"

At this, the other seven naturally withdrew their support too.

It was not till then that Chu Yao-hsien's wife thought of the head of the Small Group of Farmhands and Poor Peasants, Peng Hsin-wu, who actually escorted her husband to the District Government after his arrest. She went to his home and upon entering, immediately went down on her knees in front of the man who used to work for her as an odd-jobber before liberation. Hsin-wu helped her to her feet and said, "You'll have to speak to Tu Yu-chen about this."

That evening the problem of Chu Yao-hsien was thoroughly gone into in the Small Group of Farmhands and Poor Peasants. They discussed how and under what conditions they would bail him out. The final consensus of opinion was: one, upon his return Chu Yao-hsien must publicly admit his mistakes in a mass meeting; two, he must undertake to guarantee never to spread rumours again or undermine in any manner the carrying out of land reform; and three, he must turn in the crop payment he cheated the government during the period of autumn taxation. Yu-chen was the one who put forward these three ideas, and the others all agreed.

Three days later Chu Yao-hsien was let out of jail. Three days had already brought him down quite a bit. At a public meeting held that evening, the now subdued Chu who had little resemblance to the "scholar" of old made his apologies before the peasants. He promised never to spread rumours again or to do anything detrimental to land reform. As for cheating the government during the autumn taxation, he said that this was true and that he would go to the *hsiang* government immediately after the meeting to make a clean breast of things, and to hand over the amount he owed.

Peng Kuo-chang, a teacher at the primary school in Big House Lo, was holding a class when he heard someone yell inside the homestead, "Peng Erh-hu is caught!" Throwing down the textbook, he rushed out of the room and hurried after the peasant who had been shouting the news.

"Is it really true?" he asked.

"Every single word of it," said the peasant with pride. "I saw it with my own eyes in Shihma *hsiang*. He was all tied up with ropes, and Fu-chuan, who was following behind, had on a grin which practically stretched from ear to ear."

When Peng Erh-hu was brought back to the District Government, the Second Divisional Tribunal of the People's Tribunal immediately decided to have an open hearing in the Huilung *hsiang* government office. District Government Chairman Shao Tsu-chang was to act as judge, and eight peasants were invited to make up part of the jury. Among them were Yueh-lien, Fu-chuan and one Li Chen-nan, who had worked as a farmhand for Peng Yin-ting.

By then the Huilung *hsiang* militia could already boast of possessing weapons of a rudimentary kind—namely, spears. True, they were primitive weapons, but in the hands of grimly determined peasants, their gleaming points could still send a shiver down the spines of landlords. Behind the militia were crowds of peasants from the village.

Confronted with this awesome display of the power of the people, the three landlords resorted to all kinds of crafty evasions. It was too bad that right there sitting among the jury were farmhands who had toiled for them and maid-servants who had heated their opium and emptied their chamber pots. They simply had to plead guilty to some of the charges.

For instance, Peng Yin-ting admitted that he had collected together 80 sacks of copper coins for the Japs, for how could he deny it with Li Chen-nan as a witness to everything? Didn't Li Chen-nan have to transport some of the coins in a hand-cart himself and get tenants to help him ship off the rest? Another more heinous crime was also laid at his door—that of abetting the Japs in capturing two young guerrilla fighters. He was present when soldiers of the "Japanese Imperial Army" hacked off their heads on the open ground in front of the ancestral temple. Later, at the order of his Japanese masters, he had their heads tied to bamboo poles and planted on the dyke

near the Seven Star Slope for exhibition until they rotted. Finally, Peng Yin-ting had to confess to yet another charge. He admitted that a remnant organisation of the "Circle" had its headquarters in his house. But "the members had disbanded long ago." At first he denied that he had any small arms, but two ex-Circle members, a carpenter and a builder, who had helped him construct a secret double wall, testified and gave the whole thing away. Two six-shooters, one revolver, 500 cartridges and one huge trunk of jewellery and valuables were found in the hiding place.

Now for Lo Pei-jung. He admitted that prior to liberation he had treated peasants in the village somewhat roughly since he thought, with his son-in-law serving in the KMT army as a battalion commander, he had nothing to fear. Shortly before the arrival of the Land Reform Work Team, he had twice visited the Peng brothers. According to him, Peng Erh-hu had made repeated attempts to contact that KMT battalion commander through him. He did ask someone to pass the word but nothing ever came of it as later on his son-in-law was reported to have been arrested in Canton. As for rumours, he confessed he might have spread around a few, but not intentionally.

Peng Erh-hu at first would not plead guilty to any of the charges. Crossing his arms over his breast, he said defiantly, "I've been told the People's Government is reasonable and would never browbeat people. Now let us see!" The fake deed of transaction which Fu-chuan produced momentarily threw him off-balance. To make it worse, a search of his person revealed that he had on him a written statement with Fu-chuan's thumbprints on it saying that the land was to revert back to its original owner in case Chiang Kai-shek should come back.

Peng Erh-hu was tongue-tied. Before he had a chance to recover his composure, accusations from different quarters began to pile up.

One accused him of embezzling public money for dyke repairing when he was Village Elder, causing yearly floods. Grandma Li's shrill voice was also heard. "My Teh-ming! Give me back my son!" The school teacher Peng Kuo-chang said, with a catch in his voice, "Peng Erh-hu, how did my father die at your hands? My aunt didn't tell me until after liberation that you were responsible for his death, but I still don't know the details. Tell me!"

Of the three criminal landlords held in temporary custody in the temple, two had blood on their hands. Peng Yin-ting was guilty of collaborating with foreign imperialism and causing the deaths of patriotic youths, and hiding weapons during land reform, with the intent of carrying out subversive activities. Peng Erh-hu had killed revolutionary cadres during the First Revolutionary Civil war of 1927. After the victory over Japan, he had committed many corrupt and fraudulent acts besides helping the KMT by levying taxes and pressganging able-bodied men. He, too, hid weapons during land reform and spread rumours to undermine the land reform.

Lo Pei-jung was not much better, though no death could be traced to him. A tyrant landlord, he had consistently adopted a high-handed attitude towards peasants and by spreading rumours had also tried to sabotage land reform.

The confessions of the three prisoners and recommendations of the Divisional Tribunal were passed on to the County People's Tribunal over the telephone. In the evening came the telephoned reply: "Regarding Lo Pei-jung's tyrannical deeds before liberation, the peasants should certainly take them up when they settle accounts with him. But since he also

went in for rumour-mongering during land reform, he should be duly punished. The five-year sentence which the District Government recommended is too light for such a misdeed. To give other landlords an appropriate warning, it should be changed to a longer term, the actual length depending on the masses' accusations. With regard to the Peng brothers, this Tribunal thinks the death sentences suggested by the Divisional Tribunal are just. However, a meeting for public judgement should be held before their execution, to make sure that all peasants have an opportunity to express their opinion and to pour out their grievances. Then execute them on the spot in the presence of the masses, so that the peasants can shake off the last trace of dread they have for the landlords and other landlords may thereby receive a timely warning."

* * *

December 17th. The sky was overcast. On the Huilung *hsiang* field-paths one could see here and there red flags fluttering against a grey backdrop. Peasants, men and women, beating gongs and drums, once more poured into the open meeting place in front of the ancestral temple. Again a platform was made on the terrace, in front of which were placed two square tables. A horizontal tablet was hung on the spiked railing outside the temple with the characters: "Second Divisional Tribunal of the County People's Tribunal: Meeting for Public Trial" written across it.

At around ten, the Judge together with 16 members of the jury walked to the platform amidst prolonged, enthusiastic applause from the masses. Following them came two cadres to keep a record of the trial. The meeting opened with the singing of the national anthem, with the students of the primary school at the Seven Star Slope in the lead. Then everybody took off their hats and bowed to the national flag and to the portrait of Chairman Mao.

"Today," announced the Judge, who rose to his feet, "we are going to pass judgement on three criminal landlords from Huilung *hsiang*."

At this the three prisoners, handcuffed, clambered up onto the two square tables in front of the platform, under the close surveillance of a squad of militia and six guards from the District Government. The guards were armed with rifles or six-shooters with floating silk tassels. Peng Yin-ting was trembling all over, his head bent low. Lo Pei-jung made a deep bow to the audience when he got up. His face was as pale as the mackerel sky. Peng Erh-hu's mouth was clamped shut, and with cruel bulging eyes he scanned the jostling masses below, expressionless.

"We've caught these rogues," continued the Judge. "They couldn't escape if they had wings on them, so you don't need to be afraid of them any more. Now is the time for everyone to pour out the grievance he has kept in his heart for years—murder, swindle, rape, ill-treatment, everything. The final verdict of this tribunal on the prisoners will be based on your evidence and your opinions."

The first to reach the platform was a woman in her early fifties.

"My name is Peng Shu-min," she said, fingering the red insignia pinned on her breast. One of the first Huilung *hsiang* women to join the Peasants' Association.

"I am Peng Kuo-chang's aunt, and I am accusing Peng Erh-hu on behalf of my third brother, Peng Chiang, Peng Kuo-chang's father. In the 16th year of the Republic,* my

* The Manchu Regime was overthrown and the Republic began in 1911. Therefore, the 16th year is 1927.

third brother was Vice-Chairman of the local Peasants' Association. At the return of the reactionaries, he took me and his wife, and their 3-year-old son Kuo-chang to the hills, where he became a member of the Red Army. My old father was thus left alone at home.

"Peng Erh-hu had a group of soldiers from the 'Country-side Liquidation Corps' quartered in our house. They ate up everything they could find and burnt and destroyed. What's more, they dragged my father, who was then in his eighties, to the temple where they strung him up, beat him, and trampled on his back, in order to get him to hand over a list of the members of the Peasants' Association. My father's spine was broken but he died without giving them the list.

"In the 12th moon of that year, my brother thought he'd come back in disguise and look my father up for the lunar New Year. Before he had a chance to set foot inside the homestead, Peng Erh-hu caught him. He was stabbed several times and left to die. After he died, we still didn't dare collect his body; so finally, we had to ask some country people to stuff it inside a sack and take it to the foot of the hill to be buried. I had a glimpse of him before they lowered him into the grave. His ten fingers were covered with bruises from the bamboo pricks they forced between the flesh and finger nails and all his upper and lower teeth had been knocked out...."

Her face was white with fury. She pointed an accusing finger at Peng Erh-hu. Tears of sympathy trickled down the cheeks of the militia members standing nearby.

With raised fists, the audience below shouted in one voice, "Down with reactionary landlords!" "We demand that Peng Erh-hu be shot!"

Standing there as though rooted to the ground, Peng Shumin tried to go on, but couldn't, because there seemed to be a lump in her throat. Finally she managed to get these words out:

"Killing one of the chickens we have around the house would practically scare me to death ordinarily. But now I feel I could kill this Peng Erh-hu with my bare hands!"

A young peasant was the next to appear on the platform. Bowing to the audience, he began:

"My name is Tien Yi-che, and I came from Tienchialung in Shihchiao Village. In 1939 when the KMT said they would co-operate with the Communists, the New Fourth Army marched up north to fight the Japanese, leaving behind a People's Livelihood Team, with my father, Tien Chih-cheng as its captain. The Team was to mobilise the peasants into guerrilla units to fight the Japs.

"Seeing the people organised and armed, Peng Yin-ting began to feel nervous about the security of his own position as Village Elder, so he sent for a whole regiment of Yang Sen's (a KMT general's) men and made a raid on the Team's headquarters on the night of March 23, taking seven comrades away. Later on they got on the track of my father, the captain, and to this day I've never heard from him.

"The arrival of the Japs made no difference to Peng Yin-ting's position. He still continued as Village Elder, and not for one instant had he taken his eyes off our family. Without even bothering to give a pretext, he took our ox away from us. It finally got so that we had to take other names and live away from home. We didn't dare come back until after liberation. Nothing short of death is good enough for this traitor, Peng Yin-ting!"

Paper flags crackled and the square was a forest of upraised fists. The crowd yelled, "Down with this traitor-landlord!" "Wipe out reactionary power!" "A life for a life!"

Mass sentiment continued to run high when Fu-chuan and Grandma Li unburdened themselves of their grievances.

They were followed by a young peasant, Lo Yung-nien. With a deep bow he introduced himself and began: "I'm landlord Lo Pei-jung's nephew. Sometime before the Land Reform Work Team came here, Lo Pei-jung once gave me some of his title deeds to be taken to a photographer's shop at the Seven Star Slope to be photographed. 'So that I'll have some evidence on hand once the real deeds are burnt,' he said. Also he hid two of his trunks in the attic of my house. The way I looked at it in the past—well, he's my uncle, isn't he? I hadn't the guts to refuse him. Now I realise that he's a landlord, and I'm a poor peasant. He has fish and meat by the mouthful, and rotten potato is all my family ever tasted. I was a fool. I can't face Chairman Mao if I don't deliver at once to the *hsiang* government the two trunks he asked me to keep for him!"

The masses again shouted in unison. "Down with criminal landlords who hide and disperse their properties!" "Long live the unity of the peasants!"

It had started raining. But the tense atmosphere did not in any way lessen. A woman tearfully told of how Peng Erh-hu had raped her 14-year old daughter. The accusations were practically drowned in the shouts from the masses. Hoarse voices were heard, shaking the half-moist fields:

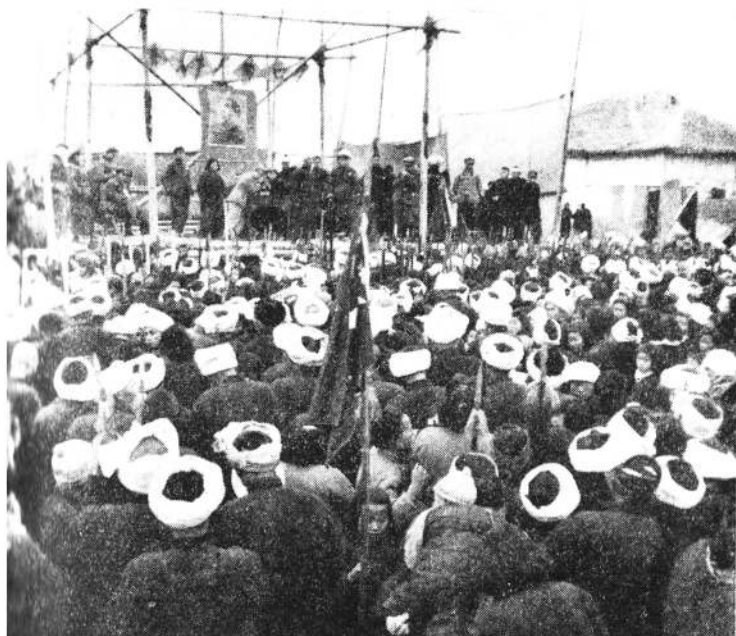
"Shoot Peng Erh-hu!"

"Shoot Peng Yin-ting!"



Peasants talk about their past sufferings to cadres helping to carry out the land reform.

The first mass meeting when village leaders make known and explain the land reform policy.





An early stage in the land reform. Farm labourers, poor and middle peasants shout at a mass meeting: "Down with feudal landlordism!"



Typical village militiamen.



Women members of the village militia.



Two reactionary landlords who tried to sabotage the land reform are arrested by the militia.



The People's Tribunal immediately holds a preliminary investigation.



Peasant women expose the landlords' wrong doings face to face.

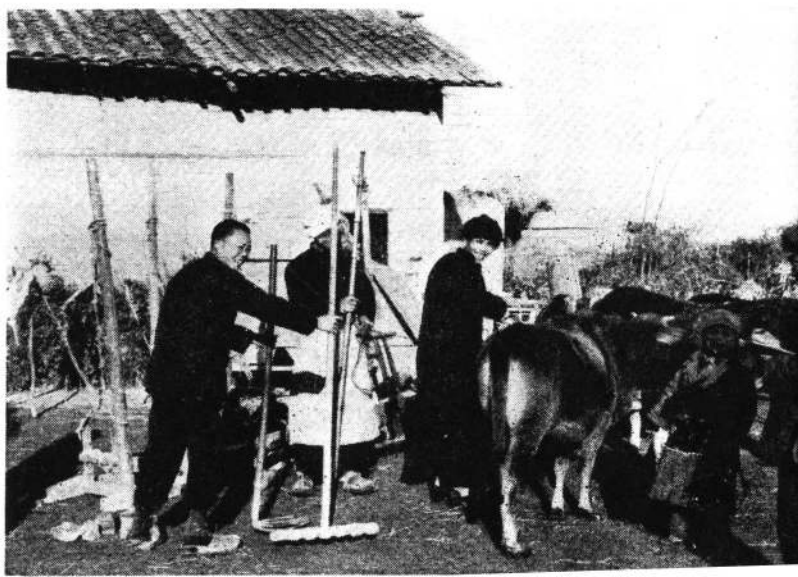
The exact class status of each peasant in the village is carefully discussed and decided upon at meetings such as this.





A decisive stage is reached. The collective decision on each peasant's class status is publicly displayed.

The Peasants' Association makes an inventory of all farm tools and draught animals confiscated from the landlords.

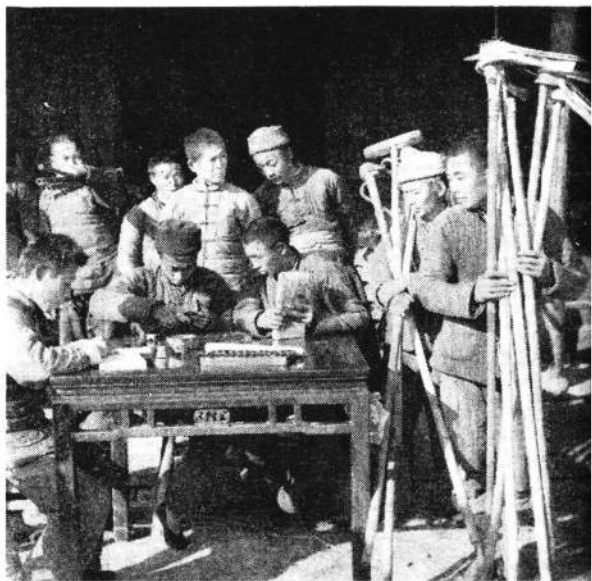


Committee members of the Peasants' Association carefully calculate the fair distribution.





Peasants carrying home their share of the surplus grain confiscated from the landlords.



Farm tools are distributed to the peasants according to their needs.



Poor peasant Ku says:
 "I've lived for 64 years
 but never before have I
 had a buffalo to my name!"

She is on her way to erect this signboard on the land her family has been allocated. The signboard states the family's name and certifies that they have received 11 *mou* of land.





Peasants joyfully consign the landlords' title-deeds to the flames.

After the land reform, peasants are eager to take part in literacy classes. Here is a newspaper-reading group organised by the peasants themselves.



After the distribution of land has been completed the peasants hold celebrations. Here a popular folk play is being presented.



A cadre gives the peasants a talk on current events in Korea.



After land reform the peasants combine to reinforce river embankments against another age-old enemy—flood.

Peasants repairing a reservoir to improve the irrigation of their fields.



"Punish the criminal landlord, Lo Pei-jung!"

"We won't go home until the Peng brothers are shot!"

By four o'clock over 20 peasants had poured out their grievances from the platform. Mass sentiment had surged to boiling point. Over and above there was a curious hush of expectancy. Not one person left or took shelter in spite of the terrific downpour.

After retiring to the inside of the temple to deliberate over the cases, the Judge and the jury came back and took their seats amidst thunderous applause.

The pale features of the three prisoners standing on the tables suddenly became hard and drawn. Leaning a little to one side, they pricked up their ears to listen to the Judge pronounce the final verdict.

"Peasant Comrades!" The Judge's voice was grave. "We have just heard some of the accusations made by local peasants. From these accusations, it ought to be clear to everyone how the landlord class has always worked hand in glove with the enemy of the peasants—whether it was Japanese imperialism or the KMT—to oppress the peasants themselves. The same motive has prompted them to act as fawning lackeys to American imperialism, since American imperialism is directly opposite to the people's interests too.

"Our verdicts on the three criminal landlords are as follows: Lo Pei-jung, age 40, native of Hsinlu Village, is charged with rumour-mongering and dispersing of properties. Now these are crimes that the people won't tolerate. Not only has Lo Pei-jung dispersed his belongings, but he had made photostat copies of his title-deeds, which shows that he is still pinning his hope on the KMT reactionaries. After careful

consideration, the jury decided on a unanimous sentence of seven years. Do you all agree?"

There was a great burst of joyous applause and Lo Pei-jung was led away by militia members to be placed in temporary custody inside the temple.

"Peng Yin-ting, age 49, native of Hsinlu Village, has caused the deaths of patriotic youths during the Resistance War. After liberation, he organised superstitious societies and spread rumours to delude the public. Also he has hidden firearms with the intent to plan for an uprising. The sentence for him is—death. Do you all agree?"

The sound of applause that came from below the platform was deafening.

"Peng Erh-hu, alias Peng Tien-pao, age 47, native of Hsinlu Village, was a captain of an anti-Communist guerrilla team and of the Countryside Liquidation Corps during the First Revolutionary Civil War of 1927, in which capacities he had several times broken up peasant organisations and caused peasant leaders to be arrested or killed. After the defeat of Japan, he succeeded his brother as the bogus Village Elder and spared no efforts in pressganging men and extorting 'contributions' for the KMT reactionaries, with a view to furthering the war against the people. In addition to these, he has been charged with misappropriating dyke funds, with disastrous results to the welfare of the peasants. For him also the death penalty. Do you all agree?"

The applause that greeted this pronouncement was even more enthusiastic. The militia held their spears way up to express wholehearted support, and voices had almost become strained with the shouting of slogans:

"Abolish the wicked landlord class!"

"Long live the People's Government that sides with the peasants in their struggle!"

Peng Yin-ting and Peng Erh-hu were then led off the platform by the militia and the guards. The latter were to see to the actual execution. The masses opened up to let them pass through.

With one arm sheltering his tear-stained face, Peng Yin-ting was hurried along. Intermittent sobs kept issuing from his gaping mouth. Peng Erh-hu's face had taken on an ashen pallor, and his bulging eyes were fixed and full.

When Grandma Li, with her bony fist clenched, edged her way through the crowds and tried to hit him on the shoulder, the guards immediately stopped her. A cordon was quickly formed by them around the prisoners as more blows were about to shower from all directions.

It was now raining harder. Once outside the temple ground, there were not even many trees to take shelter under. But men and women in an uninterrupted stream followed closely behind, almost as though they wanted to make sure that not one prisoner would escape.

The prisoners were escorted to the graveyard south of the temple. From the back of the graveyard came the sound of several shots.

The sound shrilly pierced through the thick, moist atmosphere enveloping Huilung *hsiang*. Sighs of relief were heaved as justice was meted out to the convicted.

"Down with the reactionary landlords!"

"Long live the emancipation of the peasants!"

"Long live the Communist Party!"

"Long live Chairman Mao Tse-tung!"

The masses, for the first time, freed from their dread and restraints, let out these slogans with a voice stronger than ever. The poisonous shaft that was thrust in their bosom was at last extracted. With the disappearance of fear came the atmosphere of freedom the peasants had never breathed before.

V

Red, Yellow and White

The rain gradually came to a stop as dusk approached.

It was a new Huilung *hsiang* that greeted the sunrise the following morning. On the dykes on either side of the quietly flowing Pigeon River, one could see tall, withered grass weighed down by raindrops, glistening in the early morning sun. A soft breeze sang through the telephone wires.

Curling smoke was seen once more above the Peng-Chu Homestead. In a stream beside the temple, a duck was drifting gracefully, eagerly looking for food. Behind it followed a train of ducklings. Even the long-shut-in buffaloes had been let out to take the sun, and, as they made their way leisurely up to the field-path, they seemed the picture of contentment.

There were women laundering by the pond and men with baskets on their backs cutting grass. From time to time one of them would straighten up and stare at the graveyard south of the temple. "So tyrants are made of flesh and blood too, and a few bullets can easily dispose of them! You, Peng Yin-ting, why don't you get up again to bully us? And you, Peng Erh-hu, where are your old airs now?"

For thousands of years it had been the invariable rule for people like Fu-chuan and Grandma Li to be kicked around, swallow insults and cringe without hitting back. But the sight of the two tyrants gone down before the law had instilled confidence into them and the last vestige of fear for the landlords was dispelled.

The day was December 18 and, for a change, instead of Lu Yang going out to call on the peasants, they had come to look for him. One of them reported how a certain "big family" had sunk their pewterware into a pond to avoid confiscation. Another came lugging a number of trunks and bundles which some landlord had deposited with him before the arrival of the Work Team. "I now understand," he said, "that these things are really ours, and I'll be damned if I act as 'an air-raid shelter!'* any more."

What kept Lu Yang busiest, however, was the registration of militia members.

"Comrade Lu," Li Ta-ming, a farmhand from Li Garden, thus addressed him. "Please put down my sister's name too. We would like to do night patrol together."

"Comrade Lu!" This came from Tu Yu-chen, who bounced into the room. "My mother-in-law says it's all right for me to join." At first Tu Yu-chen had wanted to enlist in the militia in spite of her mother-in-laws' strong opposition. Lu Yang had dissuaded her from it, saying that such over-straining of relations would only create greater handicaps. He'd advised her then, "Come when she's changed her mind." Now Tu Yu-chen had her wish. She also confided in Lu Yang that she had

* Term used by peasants indicating a hiding place for landlords and their properties.

sent word to her ferryman husband to quit his present job and come back for a share of land.

Hsin-wu's wife, already eight months with child, also wanted to join. Lu Yang shook his head.

"The militia will go on. It's not for only one or two days. After the land reform, it will be kept up as a regular peasants' military organisation to protect the peasants' own interests. There's plenty of time."

Chun-hsing also joined, and that was a big event. Ever since she became a member of the Women's Small Group, she had stubbornly refused to return to Big House Lo. To the Lo family she had this to say: "For me to go on being a child-bride is out of the question. You want me to pay for what I've eaten during the five years, don't you? All right and good. First you must pay me my five years' wages. During the past five years, I've fed pigs and cattle, spun three ounces of yarn a day and woven I don't know how many hundreds of yards of cloth for you. Pay me my wages and I'll pay you my board."

She owed this brilliant stratagem to the instruction of Mrs. Peng Hsin-wu. As had been more or less expected, the Lo family at first yammered about a lawsuit but thought better of it.

All the militia members being activists of the village, scarcely a night went by without their patrolling around, armed with spears, to watch over the landlords. When off duty, they attended night schools where they studied how to differentiate between the various classes. The school, sponsored by the *hsiang* Peasants' Association, was located in the Lo Family's Primary School in Big House Lo. There the peasant-pupils all sat on long benches and they easily filled the classroom.

Grandma Li, Fu-chuan, Chun-hsing, Tu Yu-chen—they all attended classes regularly and threw themselves heart and soul into the study of this fundamental work so essential to land reform.

In the night school Lu Yang first explained the purpose behind this class differentiation—to draw a clear line of demarcation between peasants and landlords, between friends and enemies. He pointed out how necessary it was in the work of preparing the further transformation of rural society. As to how the actual differentiation was to be made, Lu Yang's approach was to get at the essential points first and avoid the technical details. For instance, he pointed out that a rich peasant differed from a landlord by taking part in labour and that whether a person was to be classified as a rich peasant or middle peasant depended on whether or not his income from exploitation exceeded 25 per cent of his total annual income. Middle peasants depended chiefly upon their own labour for their living and did not usually hire themselves out. Those who only slightly exploited others without over-shooting the 25 per cent mark were to be considered well-to-do middle peasants. Poor peasants were those who had to cultivate land and sell their labour power as well. Farmhands generally had neither land nor farm tools, and depended mainly on the sale of their labour power for their living.

Then with the Village Chairman and Chairman of the Peasants' Association as guides, the peasants picked out a few landlords and rich peasants from the three homesteads in Hsinlu Village and discussed each individual case.

While class differentiation was being taught in the night school, members of the Small Group of Farmhands and Poor Peasants began making tentative classifications on the basis of what they had learnt. Small Group Leader Peng Hsin-wu

had gone through a three-month land reform training course in town shortly after his discharge from the army. Therefore he led the others in making classifications, starting with the big families. In the course of classifying, they also had a chance to investigate all the related problems touching each



"Class differentiation" was taught at the night school

landlord or rich peasant such as his labour conditions, the extent of his exploitation, the number of labourers he hired from 1946 to 1949 and whether or not he practised usury.

There was the case of a woman in Big House Lo who had a six-year old boy. Her husband, formerly a battalion commander in the KMT Army, had not been heard from since 1945. Her land was all rented out and she had lent out money. Both Fu-chuan and Li Ta-ming voted for making her a landlord.

Hsin-wu wanted to know why, and Fu-chuan answered, "She never laboured. And that's not all. Didn't her husband help the reactionaries fight us? What else could she be if not a landlord?" Chun-hsing, whose experience as a child-bride in Big House Lo made her qualified to judge, thought so too and justified her opinion by remarking that the woman was "mean and nasty."

Good-naturedly Hsin-wu went into a detailed explanation. "The degree of exploitation," he pointed out, "should be our chief consideration in class differentiation. We must not confuse class status and political background. As for personal likes or dislikes, there is still less reason for their entering into the matter. It's not as though she were actually anti-revolutionary, in which case she'd certainly be arrested. She has no labour power in her family and the amount of land she rents out is quite small. Therefore a small land lessor is the correct classification for her."

* * *

This went on for over 10 days. A great many peasant activists in Hsinlu Village succeeded in grasping the correct standard for class differentiation. The Small Group of Farmhands and Poor Peasants made out a tentative list of local landlords and rich peasants and submitted it to the Peasants' Association for inspection. A two-day check-up followed, mainly to see if any rich peasant had been classified as landlord by mistake. Then came the first Class Differentiation Meeting, this time inside the temple, in the big hall.

The day before, all those who had been classified as landlords were notified by the Peasants' Association to register punctually at eight o'clock in the morning. The meeting place was simply furnished with a square table and a few benches placed beneath the portrait of Chairman Mao. Before the

landlords showed up, the hall was already filled with peasants. Tu Yu-chen's ex-ferryman husband cheerfully threaded his way through the crowd with a fat baby in his arms and a broad grin on his face. "Catch me wandering outside," said he, "when I can get a share of land at home!"

When the landlords arrived on the scene, the peasants saw that they were followed by a group of the people's militia, including such people as Fu-chuan, Li Ta-ming and Chun-hsing, all carrying spears, alert and vigilant. Most of the landlords, by contrast, looked abject and cowed. A few of them brought along tiny bamboo baskets, in which some charcoal was burning in sand to warm their hands.

Around half past eight, the Chairmen of the village and the Peasants' Association and the Secretary of the Village Government, with files, account-books and abaci under their arms, took their seats around the square table, and Lu Yang stood up and called the meeting to order.

"Our Hsinlu Village," said he, "will begin our class differentiation today. We've had half a month of preparation and discussion. Now, the people standing there we regard as landlords. Our decision naturally is backed by strong factual evidence. We'll start by asking them to state their own financial standing. Mind you, we want absolute honesty. If anybody catches them in a lie or a trick, don't hesitate, point it out to their face. Of course, they also have the right to defend themselves if they think our decision is unjust."

Li Chao-chu was the first landlord to stand up. Considered an educated man because he had gone through a normal school course in Changsha, he had carefully studied every article of *The Agrarian Reform Law* in preparation for this very meeting. He had on a light blue gown, and his small sharp features were half-shaded by a felt hat. His cheeks

and chin were protected from the cold by a white towel which he had tied under his hat. After delivering a sketchy account of his financial condition, he cast a scornful glance at the peasants and said in an icy, cutting tone: "Make me a landlord if you like! Remember, however, that I'm not one of those idlers who reap what other people have sown. I labour also. Therefore, if we go by the Law, I ought to be classified as a rich peasant."

"In what way have you laboured?" asked Li Ta-ming with suppressed anger. He'd worked as a farmhand for Li Chao-chu for five years.

"When work was busy down in the fields, didn't I also climb out of bed before it was light?" replied Li Chao-chu.

"Sure!" The excited Li Ta-ming rose and pointed his finger at Li Chao-chu. "You climbed out of bed to hustle us farmhands to work. Then you returned to your sleep. Lots of times after I'd fetched six bucketfuls of water, I could still hear you snoring!"

"But," said Li Chao-chu in a faint voice, his cockiness fast disappearing, "I used to go down to the field even when it was raining. If that is not labour, what is?"

"You have the nerve to mention that?" Li Ta-ming noisily spat on the floor to show his contempt. "When we were threshing corn, you stood leisurely by on the field-path and 'directed' us. That's all you did. You wanted the corn well threshed. Not one single grain was allowed to go to waste. Our work had to be both fast and thorough. Now, look at me. I started ploughing the field early in spring when the soil was still frozen hard. My feet were covered with cuts and bruises, and the pain I felt when I washed them in the evening was something awful. Then turning the water-wheel in June under

a scorching sun until I felt groggy—you wouldn't understand that either. In August, bringing the hay in would often keep me busy until well into the night. When I finally collapsed on the hay pile, I'd sleep like a log and wake up to find myself covered with dew. These, and lots more, are things that you don't know. I've worked for five landlords. You're all as bad! You all eat a lot but don't stir yourselves. And you talk about labour!"

Uncle Kuang-lin, one of Li Chao-chu's old tenants, also could not contain himself any longer. In a voice shaking with emotion, he said: "I've stood about as much as I can from Li Chao-chu. A few *tou* of land was all I rented from him and what treatment I had to put up with! For every *tou* of land, he must have a chicken as 'extra.' One year his wife bore him a daughter. He was disappointed and took it out on me, saying it was because I had been sending him hens. From that time on, he wouldn't accept anything but roosters. But roosters can't lay eggs, so we had to present him with eggs too, by the hundreds.

"When it was time for him to collect rent, he said there were three kinds of grain he would absolutely refuse to touch: wet grain, flat grain and reddish grain. His invariable rule to test the quality of the grain was first to scoop up a handful and scatter it over the table. Then he'd blow at it hard with all his breath. If the grains of rice remained where they were, he was satisfied. Otherwise he'd say they were bad and refuse to take them."

A young peasant rose and, pointing at Li Chao-chu, said, "My name's Li Jih-chang. I happen to be his nephew but he's treated our branch of the family as though we were dirt. A year before liberation, mother got jaundice, and we needed money to give her treatment. We borrowed 15 silver dollars

from him and paid him two months' interest. Grain was cheap then, so he calculated the loan in terms of grain, and said it was 20 *tan*. For four months, he didn't ask for any interest. Quite the big-hearted Master, wouldn't you say? Then came a time when the price of grain went up, since the harvest was



"A fox-fur-lined gown!"

a little behind time. He therefore converted the loan into money again. After the autumn crop came in, he turned it back into grain. The result was, after a period of eight months, we found we owed him 58 *tan* of grain. That's why I've no

padded clothes to wear in winter. As for him," he flipped open Li Chao-chu's gown to give the people a full view of its fur lining, "Just you see—a fox-fur-lined gown! I don't care if you are my uncle or not. All I know is you're one of those cruel landlords!"

Seeing that his own nephew had thus turned against him, Li Chao-chu's defences began to break down. Time and again, he tried to put in a word edgewise, "All right! All right! Call me a landlord!" But the peasants' accusations went on and on. Obviously, to many of them, still getting the pent-up grievances off their chests was at least as important as class differentiation, possibly even more so. Hence although a queue of would-be landlords had lined up waiting for their turns to speak, Lu Yang gave no sign of trying to cut short or stop the peasants' accusations. On the contrary, as they made the accusations, he noted them down. When he got to some of the crimes, he would throw glances of intense hatred at the landlord, sometimes even muttering, "the son-of-a-bitch," or words to that effect. At the end of each accusation he would turn around to look at the masses expectantly as though saying, "Sure no one has anything more to say? Let's not keep anything back!"

An unfamiliar looking peasant had detached himself from the crowd. With one hand on his hip and the other pointing at Li Chao-chu, he said, "I come from Ssupu of Hsuehhu Village. Our place is high up and the water-supply has always been a problem. Every year we have to pass through his fields to operate the water wheels, and in return pay him seven *tou* of grain a day. If no grain is handy, we must pay him in the second half of the year plus one *tan* interest. Besides that we have to get him enough water to irrigate about three *tou* of land—free. If we'd been paid for it, the wages would have amounted to about one *tan* of grain. In the year 1936, he made over 100 *tan* of grain merely through that scheme, and in a few

years' time he had bought another 20 *tan* or so of land. Once before liberation, our village thought of sounding him out on the subject of the 'transit land'—just to see if he was willing to sell. But he just rolled his eyes and answered that the land had been handed down by his ancestors and was therefore sacred! Another hundred or thousand years, and it would still remain in the Li family, he said."

* * *

After five days and five nights of unceasing accusation and struggling, a first list of Hsinlu Village landlords was drawn up. The ones that had given most trouble were the landlords on the street near the Seven Star Slope, because a great many of them were concurrently industrialists and merchants. With every meeting, more new facts and new methods of exploitation would turn up, thus increasing the peasants' hatred towards their oppressors. Then followed three more days of classifying the rich peasants.

When the lists of landlords and rich peasants were ready, they were passed on to the Peasants' Association and the Small Group of Farmhands and Poor Peasants for review. Only one error was found—that of a well-to-do middle peasant who had been included among the rich peasants, and it was quickly corrected. Thus the first "class list" of Hsinlu Village's populace was posted up on the carved wall outside the Pengs' ancestral temple, one white, bearing the names of the landlords, and one yellow, the rich peasants.

When the classification process came around to the farmhands, poor peasants and middle peasants, the atmosphere changed completely. True, occasionally after someone had reported on the size of his family, his land, farm implements, draught animals and debts, others who were present might still point out omissions or mistakes. But it was, at the worst, not

unlike a family quarrel. A lot of shouting but scarcely any rancour.

Outwardly, too, they were not in conflict. They all sat in rows on the long benches facing one direction and not opposite each other. Some of the women were busy nursing children. Militia members were polishing their spears on their sleeves. A small boy with a copper ring around his neck, a charm, was dashing to and fro in the crowd with the slipperiness of an eel. All present were at ease. They knew they were among themselves, and that they all belonged to the exploited class crushed under the millstone of a feudal society.

The reports were accompanied by the noisy computations of an abacus and the Village Secretary busily entered everything in his book. As soon as one peasant had finished, the Chairman of the Peasants' Association would ask, "How do you people think we should classify him?"

The rule was to work from the top down. Therefore the peasants started with those whose life was comparatively less bitter—in other words, the middle peasants. Naturally some who fell into this category attempted to get themselves lowered. Uncle Kuang-lin was made a "tenant-middle-peasant". Although his land was rented from Li Chao-chu and he laboured himself, yet he owned quite a complete set of implements and never had to sell his labour power. On the whole, his life had not been as difficult as some. Still, he felt disgruntled and, smoothing his beard, murmured, "How come I can't be classified as a poor peasant? Do I own one *mou* of land? Don't I have to pay my annual rent to the landlord same as everybody else?"

Lu Yang hastily explained, "In the past, the land wasn't yours. After the land reform, you'll have your own land." Then he added, with a view to reassuring the middle peasants,

"The main purpose in class differentiation is to draw a line separating us from the landlords. All of us peasants are in one group. We're all the masters of the countryside. The farmhands and poor peasants of today will soon become middle peasants too, since their wealth will increase after they've got their own land."

The classification of farmhands and poor peasants also proceeded on the basic principle of each reporting on his own financial conditions. Time and again, tragic happenings were recalled. Grandma Li burst out crying when she blurted out the words, "no labour power," which reminded her again of her long lost son.

When she told how she used to take Chun-hsing with her on a begging tour, she suddenly fell into a fit of convulsion. With gaping mouth and eyes that stared fixedly, she stood for a long time speechless. Chun-hsing furnished the explanation: "One day, a landlord let out a great Mongolian dog which bit my mother on the thigh. She still has a huge scar there."

The tinfoil, incense and candle manufacturers on the street near the Seven Star Slope sent in a request to be made poor peasants. It seemed that business had declined sharply since liberation. After the land reform, they said, the peasants' cultural level would be raised and no one would want to buy superstitious articles any more. Therefore their trade was doomed to go. It seemed to them that the land reform had offered them a merciful 'out,' and they would like to leave their trade and become peasants. Lu Yang replied that they were still handicraftsmen in class status; however, in the distribution of land, their cases would certainly be considered.

When the whole thing was over, a file containing all the necessary information—name, age, amount of land and imple-

ments owned, extent of exploiting of others or exploitation sustained—was submitted to the *hsiang* government and the *hsiang* Peasants' Association for review and ratification.

As a result, the status of some of the peasants was altered. For instance, Lo Tung-sheng of Big House Lo had joined the Red Army during the Great Revolution. When the Red Army marched north, however, he got left behind and made a living out of pushing handcarts, cutting firewood and doing odd jobs. He did not start renting and tilling his four *tou* and five *sheng* of land until after liberation when the landlord had to refund interest on a debt Lo Tung-sheng had been paying interest on for years. Hence his status should be that of a farmhand, but in the file he had been mistakenly listed as a poor peasant.

The second class-list of Hsinlu Village was on red paper. It was posted up beside the first list. The names of all the farmhands, poor peasants and middle peasants were on it. All the peasants in the village, together with the children and the old people, rushed over to "take a look at the list." Those who could read stood on tiptoe and called out the names. Even the order of listing appeared significant to them, and as they pronounced each name, some would query, "number how many?"

Among the crowd were Fu-chuan and Chun-hsing, their spears tied with red tassels. Both of them had been attending night school; so they could recognise their own names, although most of the others still remained unintelligible to them.

"Aren't you happy, Fu-chuan," asked Chun-hsing, "that they've made you a farmhand?"

"Me?" Fu-chuan glanced at the list again. "Oh, that's not the only thing I feel happy about."

Hsin-wu, who had been helping other peasants with the names, turned round at this remark.

"What else do you feel happy about, Fu-chuan?"

Pointing to the list posted up on the wall, Fu-chuan replied, "I feel happy because there are so many of us on the red list."

Hsin-wu nodded. "True. Everyone should bear in mind the fact that there are ever so many of us—and with one heart. On top of this, we have the leadership of Chairman Mao and the Communist Party. Never, never again will the landlords be able to regain their old position."

On the following day, Lu Yang and a responsible leader of the Peasants' Association summoned all the landlords to the temple for a talk. There they were informed that, if they thought they were unjustly classified as landlords, they could appeal to the County People's Tribunal within the next 15 days. Further, they were told that after the third list, which was to be final, landlords were to turn over the whole of their land, farm implements, surplus houses and foodstuffs. The money deposited by peasants who rented land was to be refunded. All debts which the peasants owed the landlords prior to liberation were to be cancelled. In case a landlord had sold some land or draught animals to others after liberation, he must either try to get them back or pay their equivalent value in cash. Until the Peasants' Association officer took things over, they were ordered to protect very carefully what was to be confiscated. If anything were damaged or missing, they would be held responsible. In conclusion, Lu Yang told the landlords that they were not allowed to have guests staying in their houses and that whenever they wanted to leave the village, they must first obtain permission from the Small Group leader.

Next, the rich peasants were called together. They, too, were allowed to appeal to the People's Tribunal. Then Lu Yang reiterated the government's policy of preserving the rich peasant economy, adding, however, that according to *The Agrarian Reform Law*, the portion of land they rented out would be requisitioned after the ratification of the District Government, since it was a well-known fact that Huilung hsiang had a shortage of land. The land they tilled themselves and their other properties would not be touched. Finally Lu Yang urged them to work hard at production and not listen to rumours. "You can rely on the People's Government," said he, "never to go back on its word."

The complete file of Hsinlu Village's class differentiation documents was put together by Village Chairman Peng Yuchang and sent to the District Government. A meeting was subsequently called by the Chairman of the District Government of all the land reform cadres of the nine villages, at which he announced that on the whole all nine villages had carried out the task of class differentiation correctly and justly.

In summing up the cadres' reports, he pointed out a few cases which deserved close study. One was a rich peasant in Shihchia Village, Second Division, who insisted on giving up part of the land he tilled himself. Naturally, the cadres declined to accept it. The incident was a significant one in so far as it reflected some uneasiness which still existed in the minds of some of the rich peasants. "We haven't yet fully convinced them of our policy of preserving the rich peasant economy; hence they dare not as yet devote themselves wholeheartedly to production. More energetic propaganda work is necessary, as only in this way can we rid them of their unwarranted scruples and fears."

Then there was the affair of Liao Chon-an. Himself Village Chairman of Shuangfeng Village, Third Division, yet he helped

landlord Liao Peng-fei "slip through" part of his land with the result that the latter was made a rich peasant instead of a landlord. The fraud was quickly discovered. Liao who was exposed as an old henchman of the landlord had cunningly slipped into the job of village chairman. He was yanked from his post, and his name was struck off from the membership list of the local Peasants' Association. His accomplices also had their membership suspended. This went to show that vigilance must not be relaxed and, as the peasants' organisation expanded through struggles with the landlords, the importance of "cleaning house" must not be over-looked. He finally summed up the experiences of the nine villages in drawing class differentiations. The proper method, he said, was to work from the top down: first, enemies; then, friends; and last, our own people. Outstanding cases should be dealt with before routine ones, and complex cases should be saved till the last. In dealing with farmhands, poor peasants and middle peasants, a little leniency wouldn't do any harm.

The final lists were duly ratified by the District Government and sent back to the village to be posted up. That was a big day—the biggest, in fact, since the land reform work got underway in Hsinlu Village. Once more, a platform was set up in front of the temple, and the wall was splashed with slogans like: "Follow the Communist Party forever!" "Long live the unity of peasants!" and "Wipe out the feudal landlord class!" Everyone in Hsinlu Village came out to attend the meeting and to read the final decision of his class status which in turn would decide his status economically as well as politically.

It was a cloudy day. Occasionally, white flakes of snow would drift past. Li Chao-chu stood shivering as he read his name on the white list, the list of landlords. He had on only a torn, thinly padded jacket and a battered hat that was pulled

down practically to his eyebrows. He dared not risk having other people point at his fox-lined gown again. Behind him stood a few other landlords. Not very many to begin with, and everyone of them looked downcast and apprehensive, with knit eyebrows and lowered heads.

The rich peasants by contrast were quite different. Their number was also small. Chu Yao-hsien was there, with a hat which came down right over his head, leaving only his eyes and nose exposed. He wore, in addition, a woolen muffler around his neck, and he was more than usually quiet. Others, however, were placidly smoking their long "water pipes." Manipulating the spill with one hand, they puffed and inhaled noisily.

The long, lively and jubilant team of farmhands, poor peasants and middle peasants entered the meeting place together, in formations. Li Ta-ming marched ahead of the rest, carrying a huge red banner, on which were embroidered the characters: "Huilung *hsiang* Peasants' Association, First Division." Behind him were gongs and drums and several rows of militia armed with shining spears. Women, young men and children followed, all waving flags with anti-feudal slogans. In no time at all, the entire space was taken up while the tail of the procession was as yet invisible. The handful of landlords and rich peasants were asked to step to one side and give them the room. Even so, some of the peasants still had to remain outside the meeting place.

After singing the national anthem, Comrade Chao Chieh-min spoke up: "What is land reform for anyway? To do away with all the privileges which this handful of people," pointing at the landlords, "have assumed in order to exploit you all," and he made a wide gesture taking in the greater part of the audience. "So long as the strong team of peasants

remains organised and closely united in production, education and self-defence, there isn't any doubt but that we will pull clean out the last roots of feudalism...."

VI

Sunshine After the Storm

A few days after the final classification of classes, the Huilung *hsiang* peasants saw the year 1950 draw to a close. Ordinarily, the solar new year had been a matter of utter indifference to them, but this year, spring scrolls were pasted up on the doors and a huge party was held jointly by the farmhands and poor peasants. Yes, the year 1950 had been an unprecedented one—a year that the peasants would recall for generations.

It was at the party that the problem of reorganising the Peasants' Association was taken up.

The plan was first to get the masses to investigate the Association from the top down: To what extent had the peasants become their own masters since liberation? Was the influence of the landlord class thoroughly eliminated? Was the Association itself sufficiently strong? Were there still people outside the Association who should have been won over? On the other hand, had any irresponsible loafers or bad elements who were secretly in sympathy with the landlords infiltrated into the organisation? Then, the leadership of the Peasants'

Association needed going into also. Were the cadres active in their work? Were they firm in struggling? Had there been cases of rank selfishness or protection of landlords? Such a thorough-going investigation laid an excellent foundation for the election of officers.

The Huilung *hsiang* Peasants' Association was divided into nine "big groups", each centring in one village. Three big groups formed one "division". Each big group was again subdivided into small groups, according to geography, customs and nature of work. Hsinlu Village, for instance, had four small groups. Each small group could name three Peasants' Association officers, one of whom must be a woman. In the final count, the Peasants' Association officers of the whole village must have no less than a two-thirds majority of farmhands and poor peasants. That is to say, the number of middle peasants must not exceed one-third of the total.

Before the election got underway, Lu Yang stressed the following qualities as requisites for all the candidates: a clean record, honesty, diligence, activeness in work and firmness in struggling, and impartiality in making decisions. Each candidate must make a public self-criticism before the election started and then the peasants could offer their opinions. One candidate, for example, had it pointed out to him that he had once ill-treated his wife. However, a great many praiseworthy and exemplary acts of the peasants during the past month also came out. For example, Fu-chuan was known to have covered over 60 li on an empty stomach the day he went in search of Peng Erh-hu. When his sandals got torn, he went ahead on bare feet. Not until he had escorted Peng Erh-hu safely to the District Government did he discover that his feet were bruised and bleeding.

When the good points and shortcomings of each of the candidates had been brought out and discussed, the election

began. People held up their hands to show support of a certain candidate. Altogether 12 officers were elected, and the chairmanship of the Association devolved on Peng Hsin-wu, who was publicly acknowledged to be militant and advanced in his political awareness and struggling, impartial and friendly in his dealings, with the additional advantage of having had some education, so that he could write and do arithmetic and was especially adept at making out lists and charts. He had under him four sections: militia, organisation, culture and publicity, and the women's group. A temporary "Committee on Requisition, Confiscation, Custody and Distribution" was also set up in order to facilitate the completion of land reform.

After this sifting process, the Hsinlu Village Peasants' Association emerged as a new body with all the activists picked out and marked down for certain duties. Lo Shu-min of the Big-house Lo who was concurrently head of the women's small group, and Peng Kuo-chang, a teacher at the Lo Primary School, both found themselves in the Requisition Section. Fu-chuan and Chun-hsing were in the Confiscation Section and to Li Ta-ming and Yueh-lien were entrusted the work of taking over and transportation. As a rule, each section had four people. The Distribution Section, however, could boast of 16, including seven farmhands, five poor peasants and four middle peasants, all elected from the small groups, since distribution is the most complicated and difficult process in land reform. It involves the discovery of "black land*", correct evaluation of yearly yields, computation and redistribution of land. It could therefore be said to be the most important supervisory organ of land reform work.

* *Blackland*—land the ownership to which has been hidden to avoid pooling for re-distribution.

With the full backing of the newly strengthened team of peasants, a firm foundation was thus laid down, and the land reform work in Huilung *hsiang* went soaring ahead.

* * *

Faced with the peasants' final offensive, the landlords, though shorn of their old glory and prestige, were yet unwilling to give in docilely. They retaliated with such tactics as the dispersion and hiding of properties and the instigation of factional conflict among the peasants.

Lo Meng-hsiung, nephew of the landlord Lo Pei-jung who was serving a seven-year sentence, had several pine-trees on his land felled while the Peasants' Association was busily engaged in classification work. He got a carpenter from the Seven Star Slope, Liao San, to make two coffins for him; and sold the rest of the timber. However, he was smart enough always to appear in a shabby gown, and his wife would pretend they were poor and rush around borrowing rice from others. Actually, scarcely a day went by without their killing a chicken or a duck or what not and eating their fill. The ruse was soon discovered by the Confiscation Section. Lo was forced to cough up the cash and the coffins and all the left-over timber were promptly confiscated in accordance with *The Agrarian Reform Law*.

Practically all landlords tried to perform a few sleight-of-hand tricks in addition to perpetrating a certain amount of wilful destruction. They would extract the inner mechanism out of a merrily ticking desk clock. It was almost as though they all believed that a thing destroyed was a thing gained. Another landlord was caught by militia members while emptying sackfuls of grain into a pond at night.

Besides making clearly known its regulations governing confiscation, members of the Confiscation and Requisition Sections also attempted to guard against any deviations in the process of confiscation through signing a common pledge.

The two sections met together before setting out to work and a programme of five "wants" and five "don't wants" was passed by the eight members after a careful study of *The Agrarian Reform Law*. The five "wants" were: Confiscation of land, farm implements, draught animals, surplus houses and surplus foodstuffs. The five "don't wants" were: properties directly employed in industry or commerce, capital, movable property, physical violence and the infringement of the middle peasants' interests. Also, the members all swore not to cover up misdoings, not to practice fraud or accept bribes from the landlords. At Fu-chuan's suggestion, everyone affixed his thumb-print to the text of the pledge.

Before going to Lo Meng-hsiung's house, Fu-chuan first made a trip to the Seven Star Slope and got hold of Liao San, the carpenter. From the latter he got a piece of valuable information. It seemed in addition to making two coffins, Liao San had also been asked to construct a double wall for Lo. Armed with this information they entered the Lo house. According to a careful plan, the confiscation officers immediately divided up. Some stood by on guard. Some searched the rooms and some inventoried the various articles. Chun-hsing was entrusted with the job of forcing Lo Meng-hsiung's wife to hand over the title-deed to her husband's property.

Well, the deed was produced and the implements and animals were correctly inventoried. Then, placing his hands on his hips, Fu-chuan asked Lo Meng-hsiung, "Anything more?"

"You've taken away almost everything my ancestors left me. Are you still dissatisfied?" mumbled the landlord; then

pointing at the baby nestling in the arms of his wife, he added, "I swear by him, my only precious offspring, that all my properties are here before you."

"All right," said Fu-chuan, nodding imperceptibly to the militia members. They made their way straight toward a chicken-roost at the corner of the house. Lo Meng-hsiung's face turned pale as he watched them dragging it aside. Then



A comphor-wood trunk came into view

the pickaxe Fu-chuan had brought along with him began to resound through the yard. The landlord's family trembled, and the militia, leaning on their spears, stared at the wall fascinated. A few bricks were finally worked loose, and a plank was visible behind. With that hacked open, a shining

padlock fastened on to a huge camphor-wood trunk came into view.

The landlords' scheming was by no means limited to the dispersal and hiding of properties. In their dying struggle, they would never let slip any opportunity to fan up bad feelings among the peasants, to break up their unity.

It was during this critical period that the Hsinlu Village peasants went over to Shihchiao Village to witness a public trial. There were certain complications involved, as some of the backward peasants of that village had been at feud with each other owing to a slight misunderstanding arising out of class differentiation. One group, the Yu Homestead, had charged the peasants of another group, the Tseng Homestead, with over-leniency in struggling against their landlord, Tseng Kuang-wen. There was also some talk to the effect that in making up for their surplus foodstuffs in terms of gold, Tseng Kuang-wen and the Yu Homestead landlord, Yu Tzu-wen, received unequal treatment, Tseng being favoured with a higher exchange ratio. Actually it was all a pack of lies fabricated by someone behind the scenes with the intent of creating mischief. But a lot of peasants fell for it. Hence when the three villages that belonged to the Third Division held a joint meeting to struggle against the landlord Yu Tzu-wen, one loafer of the Yu Homestead by the name of Yu Feng-ching suddenly stood up and shouted, "The Tsengs are unfair. Why didn't they struggle against their own landlord equally hard?" The atmosphere in the meeting place immediately became tense, and for a short while it was touch and go whether the peasants would forget about their real enemy—namely, landlord Yu Tzu-wen, who stood complacently in front of the platform waiting to be accused—and return to the age-old custom of family feuding. Fortunately, the chairman of the Third Division had enough presence of mind. Before

things came to a head, he ordered the meeting to be adjourned since "we are not sufficiently prepared". Careful investigation after the meeting revealed Yu Tze-wen to be the real wire-puller. It was he who had bribed the loafer to come out and create a disturbance—preferably an armed clash.

Yu Tzu-wen was condemned to be shot and was executed on the spot. That was an important lesson for the Hsinlu Village peasants who thereby learnt to heighten their vigilance. Therefore, when Li Chao-chu tried to get on the good side of Li Ta-ming by saying ingratiatingly, "Ta-ming, I'm sorry I treated you in such a rotten manner in the past. I hope when the land is distributed you'll get that piece of mine near Hsiping, fertile, high up and close to a pond," Ta-ming's face immediately fell and he turned on him, "Land distribution is the job of us peasants. You don't need to come butting in. Let the end of Yu Tzu-wen be an example to you if you are also thinking of alienating us!"

The complete inventory list for Hsinlu Village was made out and checked by the Confiscation Section, and passed on to the take-over people. Then it was for Li Ta-ming and Yueh-lien and others to see to the transportation. Farm implements and foodstuffs were concentrated in the various homesteads, where a few rooms confiscated from the landlords were specially set aside to storing them. Draught animals were temporarily kept by individual peasants to ensure their safety. Then the complete inventory, with detailed explanations as to where each item was kept, went around to the Distribution Section for general computation.

There were cases of landlords who requested to pay the amount of their foodstuffs in terms of other "movable properties." The Association granted them permission to do so, and in no time at all the Pengs' Ancestral Temple was turned into

an odd kind of department store. All kinds of ornaments, tonics, drugs and cosmetics, things hitherto unknown to the peasants were gathered together there. Glancing over them, Hsin-wu made the ironic comment: there's enough stuff for an exhibition showing "the way the landlords lived".

The first job that the Distribution Section busied themselves with was discovery of "black land". If some of the land listed were not complete, then fair and judicial distribution would be impossible. As far as the landlords were concerned, all their properties had been brought out into the open during the period of class differentiation. There was practically no problem there. But some middle peasants, especially tenant-middle-peasants, still proved intractable. It was because of this that Lu Yang decided to call an informal conference for tenant-middle-peasants.

"Talk of land reform! It left me even worse off than before!" grumbled Uncle Kuang-lin. "They are dividing up my land and struggling against me!"

Uncle Kuang-lin was by no means the only person who held those sentiments. Some of the tenants who had shown themselves unusually courageous and active in fighting the landlords began to sulk also when they saw the land they had cultivated for years marked down for redistribution.

Lu Yang listened patiently to the tenants "blowing off steam"; then he pointed out to them the indisputable truth that unless the landlords were brought down and the gigantic millstone of land rent and usury shaken off, no good living was possible for any of the peasants. So far everybody was in agreement. Then he expounded the necessity of "taking the long view". Unity among the peasants must be taken as the basis for everything. It was wrong to haggle over some

immediate personal matter at the expense of the future welfare of all. That, too, was unanimously accepted. Then Lu Yang got down to brass tacks and did some actual figuring for the tenants. After land distribution, they would each have their own land and no one would need to pay exorbitant rent (from 50 to 90 per cent of the produce) any more. Apart from crop payment to the government, all that was left could be enjoyed by themselves. At the same time, while giving up a portion of their land to be distributed, they also saved on human and animal labour and fertiliser. They could cultivate what land they had with greater care and they would have time left to develop other forms of production on the side.

Lastly, Lu Yang stressed the point stipulated in *The Agrarian Reform Law*—distribution on the basis of actual cultivation. In other words, reservation comes before distribution. The original tenants had priority in reserving a certain amount of good land or land within easy reach. What's more, after the distribution was over, the two per cent of public land in the village could also be rented to the original tillers who had first claim. Another source of tillable land for the tenants could be found in such families as had no labour power or depended on renting out small pieces of land for their living.

Thus, the essential points were all cleared up, and the Work Team and the Peasants' Association went on with propaganda work on a more general scale in order to dispel the last vestiges of selfishness still harboured by some of the peasants.

Hsin-wu got a bundle of chopsticks, from which he extracted one and showed it to the peasants. He then broke it in two, with apparently no effort at all. Then he tried breaking the whole bundle and of course did not meet with any success. Thus he illustrated the principle that "unity is strength" and

that "for one peasant alone to prosper is impossible. We must all progress toward a better life together."

Next he emphasised the principle of "the plenty making up for the few and the fat for the thin" in land distribution, taking care however to point out the mistake of "equitarianism". Those who were especially poor and helpless, like Grandma Li, and those who were especially strong in labour power, like Fu-chuan, ought to get up to two hundred per cent more.

Somebody thought that was a good time for teasing Fu-chuan. "Sure, with two hundred per cent more land he could get a wife and have children." At this, everyone smiled and looked at Chun-hsing. The girl blushed scarlet and skipped out without saying a word.

Tu Yu-chen was nursing her baby, when an idea occurred to her. Addressing Hsin-wu, she said, "You'll soon have a baby too. I suggest we reserve a portion of land for him." Many peasants applauded the idea. Hsin-wu, however, was firm in his refusal. The others were equally firm in pressing the land upon him. Finally Lu Yang stood up.

"Theoretically speaking, land distribution goes per head. Suppose a person is very sick and dying. He still gets his portion if he is breathing on the day the land is distributed. The same rule applies to a baby. If he hasn't yet come into the world at land distribution, we shouldn't count him in. Therefore, land or no land, it all depends on how fast the baby can run and catch up with us."

Everybody roared with laughter.

The discussion then turned to the problem of handicraftsmen who dealt in superstitious articles like tinfoil, incense and

candles. They had asked to be given some land so that they could become peasants. The request was promptly granted.

Then the problem of production after land reform came up. First, the Village Chairman announced that they had received a notice from the County Government through the District Government, which said that this county had been entrusted the job of spreading the use of selected seeds to the extent of 100,000 *mou* this year in accordance with a five-year plan sponsored by the Central People's Government. Five comrades had come down from Changsha specially to help out, and the different levels of the Peasants' Association would assume the responsibility of publicising the campaign. The good seeds to be promoted were known as Golden-Queen Grain. Scientific tests had revealed them to be superior to the current short-stalked kind of rice on every count. Land planted with the new seeds would yield 107 catties more grain per *mou*. They developed sturdy stalks with neat ears and grew boldly upright. They could stand heavy fertiliser and were not much affected by dry spells. What's more, they showed a surprising immunity from plant disease and insects. Those who would like to get loans of this kind of seed from the government, could register and send in their requests in a month's time and return the same amount at the autumn harvest. Registration forms could be obtained from the Production Committee of the Peasants' Association. There were two varieties of seeds: one kind for common promotion, and another kind for special model propagation. They could get the seeds in the beginning of February. There was only one condition to be observed: the government-loaned seeds must not be eaten up like ordinary grain.

Owing to the difference in soil and location, two pieces of land of approximately the same size could vary a great deal in value. Moreover, the rice fields in Hunan were mostly of

irregular shapes and didn't lend themselves to exact measurement. Since measuring the land itself involved so many complications, the only reliable standard was the average productivity. Thus each peasant was asked to "appraise" his own land.

The correct procedure was for each peasant to write down the productivity of each plot of his land on a flag. Land that he owned himself had a red flag while a white one signified land rented from some landlord or rich peasant. Distribution officers would come around and make the final assessment.

On the eve of the planting of flags, the peasants all held family meetings. Each racked his memory and tried to think back how much his land used to yield in the past. Then the amount which was believed to be accurate would be written down on the paper flag. Landless peasants had a lot of work to do also. They hacked bamboo sticks and pasted paper flags for the others.

The next morning countless small flags fluttering in the wind appeared on the Hsinlu Village field-paths. Often a peasant would bring his whole family along to witness the grand ceremony of flag-planting. One was heard to mutter while sticking up his flag, "I couldn't dare look Chairman Mao in the face again if I made the amount too small." Another pointed at the Peasants' Association Membership Certificate pinned on his breast and swore that he had put down the absolutely correct amount. "I'm willing to forfeit this red silk insignia if I'm found to have cheated."

Around nine o'clock, the four small groups of Hsinlu Village and a few Appraisal Officers specially invited for that purpose appeared on the scene to conduct an actual investigation piece by piece. There was a secretary in every group

with a ledger and a copper ink box. When the final amount for a piece of land was decided after due deliberation, he would write it down on the flag and also enter it in his ledger.



The paper flags told the yield of the land

Most of the Appraisal Officers were peasants in their fifties or sixties. Standing there on the field-paths, they would run their eyes expertly over the land lying at their feet, just like old cowherds judging the age of a cow by looking at its teeth.

Almost all the peasants proved to be quite fair and unbiased in appraising their own land. It was obvious the propaganda work done by Lu Yang and his comrades was producing good results. Now and then the Appraisal Officers might decide

to raise the original amount fixed by a peasant by four or five *tou*, but even then there would be no hard feelings, because the peasant would admit cheerfully, "You people certainly ought to know better than I do." Some thought of the marvellous new seeds they would have soon and insisted that they had fixed the amount too low, because the new seeds would "grow better".

An exhibition was held at the same time by the Association of all the "fruits of struggle" they had confiscated from the landlords. Peng Yin-ting's old mansion, now also confiscated, was turned over temporarily for that purpose. A piece of red cloth, on which were written the characters "Exhibition Showing the Way the Landlords Lived", was hung over the entrance to the huge, sumptuously decorated sitting room where Peng Yin-ting used to entertain passing Japanese military officers, including Brigadier-General Shirakawa. Inside the room, on the long sideboards under the shuttered windows were displayed gold and silver ingots of the Manchu regime, buddhas and bracelets of gold, carved ivory fans, silver chopsticks, jade rice bowls, a huge closet with ingenious carvings and gold lettering and a four-poster bed with a row of small drawers on the side where delicacies and candies could be kept.

The peasants were ignorant with regard both to the names and the uses of these fancy articles. However, by contrasting them with what they themselves possessed, they could not help feeling angry and bitter. Hatred surged up in their breasts as they made the rounds, viewing each article, cursing as they went. Among them was also Yueh-lien. To her these were familiar sights, but she also paused and thought back on the way the owner of these beautiful things used to treat her.

Meanwhile, Comrade Chao Chieh-min called all the Work Team Cadres of the nine villages to a Land Distribution Meet-

ing in the temple. First, they went over together the conditions of land distributed among the three divisions. As a result, it was found that the Third Division has comparatively less land than the other two. Thereupon he decided that the First Division should transfer 23 *tàn* and five *tou* of land to the Second Division, which, in turn, should transfer 17 *tan* and four *tou* of land to the Third. Thus the three divisions would all have an average of 2.4 to 2.5 *tou* for each person entitled to receive land.

Adjustment was thus made on the *hsiang* basis. Next they had to investigate the problem of land owned by each village. The average of Hsinlu Village for instance, was .04 *tou* higher than that of Shihchiao Village, and .07 *tou* higher than that of Yunhu Village. The three villages, therefore, got together and discussed the best method of readjustment. It was not merely a job for the mathematicians. In adjusting land, you have to think about the peasants' domestic problems and the problem of housing. Nothing is easier than to shift people around on paper, but the moment you want it done, human problems begin to pile up. Finally they decided to follow the way of the Old Liberated Area. Yunhu Village, which adjoined Shihchiao Village, would have a tract of land pared down equal in size to what Hsinlu Village should allocate. Then Hsinlu Village, in its turn, would also rule out the corresponding amount of land where it touched Yunhu Village.

* * *

It was almost 50 days now since land reform started. The peasants of Huilung *hsiang* had risen early and gone to bed late, and one by one they had pulled the landlords down. They had made out class differentiation lists for the whole *hsiang* down to the minutest detail, assumed control of the properties handed over by the landlords and hunted down what the latter had dispersed or hidden. They had achieved so much simply

because they had refused to compromise, ignored temptation and threats and kept on struggling to the very end. Undoubtedly, the last month or so had been a stormy period.

On the eve of land distribution, the whole of Huilung *hsiang* seemed to brighten up. The storm was over, the sun had come out and joy was in every heart. From now on, a peasant would be able to enjoy fully the fruits of his own labour. He could brace back his shoulders and, waving a hand at the land he cultivated, say with honest pride, "This is *my* land." A new, rational state of things had risen like a fresh, golden dawn breaking over the horizon.

And for three days and three nights, the main hall in the Pengs' Ancestral Temple swarmed with people—people on whose faces were written happy expectations.

Peng Yu-chang, Lu Yang, Hsin-wu and other Distribution Officers of the Association clustered around a square table beneath Chairman Mao's portrait. The time was already nearing the end of January, 1951, and the overthrow of the feudal land system was all but completed. Inside the feudal temple, an icy wind whistled down people's necks. A few peasants had brought along bundles of hay from their homes and built a huge fire in the middle of the hall. Fu-chuan and Li Ta-ming sat one on each end of the haystack and fed the fire when it got low. The dry rice stalks crackled and the flame leaped up and down. Shadows played on the peasants' smiling faces, and warmth and harmony and deep-felt joy pervaded the whole gathering.

Each peasant would step up beside the fire and report on the number of people he had in his family. (Actually, in most cases, they were also there with him.) Then how much land and farm implements he owned. The Distribution Section

would then open their ledger of "land to be divided" and select a share of land according to the amount the peasant was entitled to. Opinions from the masses could be offered on the spot. The peasant himself was also allowed to make suggestions. Aged people would get land that was located conveniently near. Those who owned water-wheels were given land higher up. Those who lacked certain implements could report and get new ones. Draught animals were shared, one among several families. In order not to overwork the animal, a three *tan* maximum of ploughing was set for each ox.

When Fu-chuan's turn came, he handed over his bundle of hay to Chun-hsing. Family? "One—myself." Land? "No land." Implements? "No implements." The crowd insisted that he should have two portions. Hence he was given a plough, a hoe, a big piece of land near the Big Graveyard valued at five *tou* and 2 *sheng* and a share together with three other families of a three-year-old calf that used to belong to Peng Erh-hu. For living quarters, he was given Peng Erh-hu's study.

While people applauded and edged up to shake hands with a slightly dazed Fu-chuan, Yueh-lien rushed into the room, brushing off snow flakes from her shoulders and sleeves. "Brother Hsin-wu, Brother Hsin-wu!" Hsin-wu, who was bending over the table busily registering, raised up his head.

"Go home quickly!" she cried, gesticulating wildly, her mouth open. "Hurry and get the midwife. Your wife is in great pain!"

Hsin-wu instantly pushed his papers over to another Distribution Officer and threaded his way out through the crowd.

Tu Yu-chen also stood up. Momentarily forgetting her turn in land distribution, she thrust her own baby into the arms of her mother-in-law and followed Hsin-wu to help.

At around two o'clock in the night, the land distribution work was still in full swing when Chun-hsing entered carrying a steaming cauldron of glutinous rice. Placing it on the square table, she said, "You must all be tired out. Have something to eat!"

The officers did not think they should, since they knew Grandma Li was not so well off that she had a lot to spare, but the old woman herself was insistent. Leaning on her crutch, she urged them. "Go and eat! Otherwise we won't feel happy. This is the rice we originally saved for the lunar New Year. But now for the first time since the world began the poor folks have their own land. Isn't that better than a hundred, a thousand New Years?"

The men gave in. Someone went and got a whole stack of bowls from the back of the temple, and Chun-hsing started ladling out the rice.

In the midst of this tumult, Tu Yu-chen again appeared, slightly out of breath. Planting herself squarely before the table, she shouted:

"Attention everybody. Hsin-wu Sao (sister-in-law) has just had twins. A boy and a girl!"

The applause that greeted this announcement was nothing short of deafening. Tu Yu-chen was immediately surrounded by a crowd of curious people who wanted to know more of the details.

Then a radiant Hsin-wu showed up, bowing right and left in response to people's congratulations. A moment later, he was back in his seat, once more buried in the intricate registration work.

* * *

The next morning, all the peasants got up early and trudged through the snow to have a look at their newly acquired land. Standing on the field-path, they surveyed the snow-covered fields, in their minds figuring out the amount of fertiliser and seeds needed and also imagining the ocean of lush green that would come with the autumn. Some of the fields already had markers on them saying proudly "Victory" or "Liberation" with careful notations on the side of the new owner's name and date.

The Emancipation Meeting—the climax of land reform and an unparalleled joyous event for the peasants—was held at two o'clock on that very afternoon. Once more the scene was laid in the open ground in front of the Pèngs' Ancestral Temple. The meeting was under the auspices of the three villages that came under the First Division; for several days all the village activists had been busily preparing for it. The stage was lit up by a pair of bright red scrolls, one saying "Earth and heaven overturned and feudalism destroyed!" and the other, "Resist America and aid Korea; defend our home and country!" On a horizontal tablet were written the words, "All peasants everywhere are brothers."

The celebration started in the morning around ten o'clock. Troops of peasants carrying spears or beating gongs and drums could be seen making their way along labyrinthine field-paths toward the Peng Chu Homestead. The primary school students led the procession. Some of them were got up in multi-coloured clothes, with towels tied around their heads, lightly

skipping along doing a harvest dance. Some were members of the Young Pioneers with flowing red ties. A few had their faces heavily rouged and bounced among the procession, waving wooden swords.

The handicraftsmen on the Seven Star Slope had constructed two sedan chairs tied together with bamboo sticks and wrapped in red silk. Each chair bore four pictures framed against a background of heavy colourful brocade. On the first chair were portraits of Chairman Mao, Commander-in-Chief Chu, Vice-Chairman Liu Shao-chi and Prime Minister Chou En-lai. On the other were portraits of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin.

Some of the workers acted as chair-carriers. Some were beating gongs and drums and some were blowing bamboo flutes.

To Fu-chuan on that day was entrusted the job of looking after all the draught animals. In order to get them away from the crowd near the meeting place, all the animals were collected in the graveyard in front of the temple. Some of the oxen, when led there, were found to have colourful rings and balls tied around their horns.

Before the meeting started, Peasants' Association cadres of the three villages had already collected all the title-deeds the landlords had handed over and piled them up in the centre of the meeting place in neatly tied bundles. Some of the deeds had turned yellow around the edges, having first been drawn up in the Manchu period. Some were wrapped up with layer after layer of silk. A great variety of seals were affixed to those deeds, representing the Manchu emperors, the war-lords, the Wang Ching-wei puppet government and the KMT government. And some of the conditions stipulated in the deeds were cruel beyond belief. For example, a "big-headed

contract" meant you must write down the five *tou* of land you rented as seven *tou* and pay your rent accordingly. "Fixed rent" meant the amount of rent you had to pay remained the same even in exceptionally bad or disastrous years. "Flexible rent" meant the tenants could get the landlords to come over to a banquet in a bad year; if upon looking at the crop, he should decide to cut down the rent, all right and good. But it all depended on his whim, and very often the amount discounted was not even sufficient to cover the banquet expenses. There they were, all written down in black and white on those deeds. As the peasants looked at them, their eyes flamed with pain and hatred.

A string of firecrackers about five feet long, especially made for the occasion by the Seven Star Slope workers, was hung up right beside the pile of deeds.

The noise made by the gongs and drums grew louder as more and more people flowed in. Those who had a part in theatrical performances were already made up. The item offered by the peasants of Shihchiao Village was a dragon dance. The fabulous animal was over 50 feet in length, with its head painted gold. Its jaws moved up and down and its copper wire whiskers twitched most realistically. Yunhu Village put on a drum dance—"the Third Scholar Keeping Company with his Lass." The one who played the Third Scholar did not put his beard on right; so it kept falling off, to the great amusement of the audience. The dance performed by Hsinlu Village peasants was copied from the dance of fishermen around Lake Tungting. Chun-hsing in a pink shirt and a baby-blue skirt was "the oyster." She had two huge pieces of stiffened cloth tied to her arms, red on the outside and white inside, which represented the two halves of her shell. She was fleeing from a young fisherman, played by Yueh-lien, who followed behind her with a fishing net, acting out gestures of casting and drawing in the net.

The national anthem was sung, with the fresh voiced primary school students in the lead. Next everybody bowed to the national flag and the picture of Chairman Mao. Then the presidium, formed by the three Association Chairmen, Chairman of the Women's Association, Captain of the Militia, leader of the small group of farmhands and poor peasants and the three Village Chairmen, mounted the stage and the meeting began.

Great promises and solemn declarations were made during the meeting by peasants who never before in their lives had spoken in public. Li Chen-nan pledged that he would work hard at production and dyke repairing. Lo Shu-min demanded that women be allowed to take equal part in dyke repairing since in land distribution women received equal treatment with men.

Finally Fu-chuan also pulled himself together and ran up the stage. Nervously twisting his hat in one hand, he made a stiff bow to the audience and began:

"I only know how to meddle with mud and I can't talk. But, when we drink, we don't forget the well-digger; in emancipation, let us not forget the Communist Party! Without Chairman Mao, without the Communist Party, where would I be today? Wouldn't I still be trampled underfoot by Peng Erh-hu?"

With arms raised, the peasants sent out shouts like roaring tides.

"Long live the Communist Party!"

"Long live Chairman Mao, the peasants' Saviour!"

When the slogans gradually quieted down, Fu-chuan went on:

"I understand very well now that landlords and imperialism cannot be separated. Look at the Peng family, Peng Yin-ting and Peng Erh-hu! Didn't my father die at their hands? But we were then all 'sealed up in a drum,' since the Communists hadn't yet come to help us open our eyes. Now it's different. If America should want to do what Japan did and try to push us around, we'll get up and smash them all—American imperialists as well as all the Taiwan traitors!"

Shouts and applause shook the quiet fields of Hsinlu Village, echoing the rise of China's new peasantry.

Then a crackling sound was heard. The firecrackers were hit and bundle after bundle of deeds began to catch fire and burn. They were the weapons of the landlord class, by which they sucked the blood of the peasants. Now they were all in shreds and ashes and the wind carried them away.

VII

The First Taste of Happiness

In the newly emancipated Peng-Chu Homestead a tender undulating sound could be heard, regular, rhythmic, like the beat of the heart. It was Hsin-wu's twins crying.

The two babies lay in a pair of wicker baskets, yelling at the top of their lungs, sometimes alternately, sometimes in unison. They kicked up their heels and threw their arms about wildly, as though doing their best to announce to the world the good news: there won't be any more feudal exploitation in the new China—the new China is ours!

Hsin-wu's wife, her hair dishevelled, had to breastfeed the babies (tinned milk and Tu Yu-chen's milk also helped), as well as look after the other household duties. At the foot of the bed stood a gold lacquered stool confiscated from a certain landlord and on it were displayed a piece of cake sent along by solicitous peasant friend and a tin of condensed milk, already opened. Diapers of various size were hung up all around the room and the smell of the babies' excretion brought out by the woodfire laid in the oven pervaded the room.

Peasants kept going in and out of the room. Some brought food and delicacies. Some just wanted to "lend a hand." And some came out of a curiosity to see what those clever babies were like. Clever they certainly were, because they had chosen a most opportune moment to be born.

Instead of enjoying a bit more leisure now that the land had been distributed, Hsin-wu was, if anything, busier than before. He would leave his home early in the morning, buttoning up his coat as he went. After dashing from one small group to another the whole day, he would come back very late at night.

Enriched with the fruits of struggle, both Chun-hsing and Yueh-lien started thinking about their "trousseaux." The romance between Chun-hsing and Fu-chuan had long been a matter of common knowledge, and people had gradually stopped teasing them. But the first inkling people had that there was "something" between Yueh-lien and Li Ta-ming only came on the day of the Emancipation Meeting when the two partnered in long harvest-dance, totally oblivious of the others. The two young couples all belong to the militia. It was this that drew forth from Hsin-wu the jocose remark that the joint wedding ought to be officiated through the Militia Headquarters.

Grandma Li's first reaction to her daughter's coming marriage was one of undiluted joy. She was proud of Fu-chuan who had none of the bad habits like gambling or swearing. He worked hard and was dependable. As she went on, however, tears began to trickle down her cheeks. Yes, she'd be very lonely once Chun-hsing left.

Chun-hsing understood perfectly what was troubling her mother and reassured her by telling her that Fu-chuan had promised that she would not be deserted. Since it was owing

to Chairman Mao that we'd all been emancipated, a person like Grandma Li was certainly entitled to some better days. Fu-chuan would personally see to readjusting the rooms, so that mother and daughter needn't be separated.

On the evening of the day of the Emancipation Meeting, an "Exchange of Opinions" was held in the temple, attended by the Work Team cadres and various Peasants' Association officers. The purpose was to get the peasants to point out to the land reform cadres mistakes and deviations in their working methods and attitude during the period of the land reform. The next morning, all the Work Team comrades, scattered throughout the Huilung *hsiang* villages, met together first in the District Government Office and from there were led by Chao Chieh-min to the county seat to attend an enlarged cadres' meeting. There they were to sum up the experiences they had obtained and exchange opinions. Then they would go on to some other *hsiang* to take part in further land reform work.

Thus, the important job of consolidating the success of peasant emancipation devolved on the shoulders of people like Peng Hsin-wu—activists who rose from among the ranks of peasants.

On the morning of January 26, when Lu Yang was scheduled to start off, all of the Hsinlu Village peasants gathered together, amidst the music of gongs and drums, to give him a warm send-off. There were the militia men and women, harvest dancers, Pioneers wearing red ties and bearing flowers and, way up in front, Fu-chuan carrying a red banner on which were embroidered the characters, "Victory in Land Reform". This strong well-organised and disciplined procession of peasants picked its way along the telephone poles and went towards the Seven Star Slope.

With Shuang-chuan punting, the boat slowly glided towards Shihma *hsiang* on the other side of Pigeon River. Standing near the helm, Lu Yang first pointed at the dyke and then formed a trumpet with his hands, through which he shouted to the peasants who had come to see him off: "Work on those dykes and have a good year. Remember, this year you're bringing in your own harvest."

At this, many of the peasants standing on the dyke shouted back that they would do what he said, and Peng Shu-min certainly expressed the sentiment of the majority when she shouted in a voice slightly off-key: "Come back at the Autumn Festival, Comrade Lu, and taste our new rice!"

The boat had almost touched the other bank. Seeing that the peasants were still reluctant to go back, Lu Yang shouted again, his voice echoing back to him faintly over the icy river: "Don't forget to strengthen your organisation!"

The same evening, a meeting of Hsinlu Village Peasants' Association Officers and activists was called by Hsin-wu and Village Chairman Peng Yu-tang. One topic came up to which Uncle Kuang-lin, Tu Yu-chen and Lo Yung-nien all contributed factual details—the evils brought by water. Uncle Kuang-lin recalled eloquently how his whole family had suffered from the "tyranny of water" all through the years. The crops would have just begun to display tassels when along would come a huge flood. The dyke would collapse and everything sink under water. Lo Yung-nien's land was situated on a high ridge to which the water supply was controlled by the landlord, Lo Pei-jung, his uncle. During drought years, he had to buy water from the latter, using the "green sprouts" as his security. What frequently happened was that the interest piled up, with the result that when autumn came along, his entire harvest, over which he had sweated for a year, would go into Lo Pei-jung's barn.

The Village Chairman then reported on Winter Production Plans for the whole county. The central work was to be the repairing of dams and dykes, and getting it done before spring cultivation began. He also explained how, in the other districts which had gone through land reform already, every family made out its own production plan. Then discussion began as to how they should make their own production plan.

Everyone agreed that two sub-committees should be set up under the Production Committee of the Peasants' Association, on the basis of the four small groups of the village, one on dyke-repairing and one on the repairing of the reservoirs. Seventy per cent of the expenses involved were to be met by the peasants themselves, the amount being determined by the degree of benefits enjoyed by individual plots of land. Farmhands and poor peasants could pay with actual physical labour. For the 30 per cent deficit, they could apply for a government loan.

The work has already been planned by the County Committee on Dyke Repairing. The section that Hsinlu Village was supposed to be responsible for extended from the Seven Star Slope to the Shaho, altogether 12 li in length. The width was to be increased from the original 4.5 feet to 20 feet, and the height from the original 10 feet to 33.8 feet. The local sub-committee would take care of the division of labour among the four small groups as well as the driving in of stakes.

There were 33 reservoirs of various size in the village and most of them badly needed to be repaired. It was decided that for this year repair work would be done on a selective basis, repairing only the most dilapidated and those with the greatest capacity in water-reservation and irrigation. If there were time and labour to spare, new reservoirs would be opened. For instance, the reservoir that watered the largest area in this village was the "Horseneck Reservoir" near the Big Grave-

yard, but it had long been leaking like a sieve. The corner-stones were out of position and on the verge of breaking and the main pillar had already toppled down in the flood last year. The plank to keep the water back had also fallen down. That was where they needed to put in some good hard work without delay.

Schoolmaster Peng Kuo-chang was the next one to stand up and report. Ever since the conclusion of class differentiation, he had been conducting a "character recognition" class for peasants in Big House Lo three evenings each week. The number of students, he said, has grown so that there wasn't even standing room left, let alone benches for sitting. Old people like Grandma Li had also registered. What would the Association advise?

Hsin-wu said that the best thing would be for them first to take the problem up in class. If the public demand was really pressing, a solution would surely be found somehow.

Early the next morning, when the fields were still wrapped in a haze, the Hsinlu Village peasants, old and young, under the leadership of small group officers, began to journey towards the dyke near the Slope. Some carried hoes or shovels, some baskets for carrying the earth and some pushed handcarts. The winter sun was smiling warmly on a Huilung *hsiang* decked in silver. Along the way, they could see nail-shaped prints made by the magpies in the snow. Treading lightly on the snow-covered path, the peasants chattered, laughed and sang as they went on their way.

"Grandma Li! Surely at your age you could stay behind and let Chun-hsing go alone!"

The remark was made in obvious admiration of her "activeness" and not intended to dissuade her from going.

Grandma Li, with a meal-basket dangling loosely from one arm, turned around: "Chun-hsing's got her land and I've got mine, haven't I? How can she go in my place then? I've lived for over 50 years and this is the first time I repair the dyke 'for my own good.' How could I have the heart to stay at home?"

On the dyke the Construction Team from town had already marked out with chalk and willow branches the projected height and width of the dyke, according to an All-County Plan. The moment the peasants arrived, Hsin-wu summoned together the Small Group Leaders and divided up the work into "zones." Some of the peasants started digging earth at the foot of the dyke. Some busied themselves with carrying basketfuls of earth up the terrace-shaped slope. Above and below, you could see the energetic peasants at work, perspiring freely in spite of the bitter cold weather. As the "squares" of various size got deeper, shovels of solid, hard, wintry earth were added on to the dyke. Thus slowly, against a cold blue sky, the dyke began to grow.

That went on until the sun had gone down behind the hills. The Small Group Leaders had to beat their gongs three times before the peasants reluctantly left off.

"Now that the local tyrants are down, it seems to be pretty easy to tackle the water tyrant."

This came from Uncle Kuang-lin, as he jauntily swung his hoe on to his shoulder. Each then went back to the group he belonged to and the peasants started on their homeward journey. In the deepening twilight, more than one head turned from time to time to look at the visibly heightened dyke with pride and elation.

On the way, the groups also discussed launching an emulation drive to increase efficiency.

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That evening the classroom in the Lo Primary School was even more crowded than ever. Children of seven or eight rubbed elbows with their elders. His mind busy with the practical problems involved, Peng Kuo-chang was fully aware that it was going to be a red-letter day in the cultural emancipation of the Hsinlu Village peasants.

When Li Ta-ming complained that no more copies of the "Elementary Reader for Workers and Peasants" were available at the Local *Hsinhua* Bookstore, he nodded sympathetically, but there was a suggestion in his manner that "everything would come out all right."

"Peasant comrades!" At these words of Peng Kuo-chang's the noise quieted down. "You have worked hard the whole day at the dyke and you must be very tired. Can anyone tell me why you're still so enthusiastic about studying?"

They could think of a lot of reasons. One said in the past he had been cheated out of his pay while working for the landlord and he didn't want it to happen again. Another said he would like to be able to read the "Blackboard News." Here someone nudged Grandma Li. "And why do you want to study, you who already have one foot in the grave?"

Puffing up her hollow cheeks, Grandma Li replied: "When I was going around begging with Chun-hsing, many were the times I'd stopped outside a private school and peeked in at the landlords' children studying inside and learning all kinds of things. Those were the days for the landlords. Now the world belongs to us peasants, and we must study and learn, too. Am I not right?"

Her speech was greeted with a wave of applause.

Other peasants also told about what they had suffered through "having no education". Some got swindled when the landlords made out contracts which they could not read. Some could not even read the lots they drew and were pressganged into the KMT military service. Fu-chuan also spoke up: "If we can't read, we can't look at the newspapers and can't tell the truth from the rumours! We must know what are the things the reactionaries said and what are the things Chairman Mao said!"

Seeing that the mass feeling was so high, Peng Kuo-chang said: "Peasant comrades! Your demand for literacy is natural and legitimate. The difficulty, however, is in the shortage of classrooms and teachers. Ours is a fairly big village, seven or eight hundred people, and we have only two primary schools. Of course free education will be provided for all by the government before long. But the problem is: What are we to do now?"

There was temporary lull and everybody began to think.

"I'm willing to contribute five *tou* of grain out of what I've received in land distribution so that we may also have a school in the Peng-Chu Homestead!"

The one that spoke was Tu Yu-chen, nursing her baby as usual. She turned her head slightly and glanced meaningfully at her ex-ferryman husband, who promptly raised his hand in support of the motion, as he, too, had suffered from being illiterate. The ball started rolling. One *tou* from Uncle Kuang-lin, some from Grandma Li and some from Fu-chuan. Twenty-odd *tan* was got together in no time at all by the peasants of the Peng-Chu Homestead. Those of the Li Garden followed.

At Lo Yung-nien's suggestion, the peasants of the Big House Lo and the Seven Star Slope, who already had schools of their own, also chipped in and helped with small amounts of grain.

At this point, Head of the Women's Small Group Lo Shumin had a brainstorm. There used to be a good deal of "school land" in the villages, but the landlords usurped it all. They collected rent but didn't build any school. In land distribution all "public lands" had gone into the pool but the Association reserved two per cent of the "public land," and further confiscated a whole lot of lumber and coffins from the landlords. They had carpenters and builders right in the village. Why couldn't the Association contribute the land and the building material and the peasants contribute labour power? They could then build a school house easily.

Everybody applauded the brilliant idea.

Going home in the starlight, the peasants from the two homesteads carried on heated discussions about the architecture and set-up of their future school. It seemed as though the building had already risen up before their eyes and was no longer only in their dreams.

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When the future marriage of Fu-chuan and Chun-hsing, of Li Ta-ming and Yueh-lien was taken up during a militia meeting, everyone agreed that these two couples symbolised the true emancipation of the peasants of Hsinlu Village. The two bridegrooms both used to be farmhands, kicked around by the landlords; of the two brides, one had worked as a maid-servant for Peng Erh-hu and the other was within an inch of becoming a direct victim of feudal society—it was learnt that the consumptive boy to whom Chun-hsing was originally promised had

recently died. The double wedding was set for the 29th of the Twelfth Moon, according to the lunar calendar, and it was to take place in the office of the *hsiang* Government. The militia body was prepared to pool its strength and resources and make it a really big event.

The two couples were moved beyond words when the meeting dispersed. In the old society all they had to expect was to be spat and trampled upon, and now a new life was open before them. They knew that this would not have been possible without Chairman Mao and the Communist Party. Hence they planned to write a letter to the benefactor—Chairman Mao, in which, besides thanking him for helping them in their struggle, they would tell him the future plans the four of them had made. It was naturally a bold thing to do, but they felt they ought to do it.

By this time Grandma Li and Chun-hsing had also moved into the wing of Peng Erh-hu's house as arranged. All three of them would get up before dawn and go down to the fields to weed, sift fertiliser and repair the edge of the paddy fields which became straight and shiny like rails. That much done, they would go work on the dyke.

On the "Kitchen-God Day," the Association decided to give the two couples a day off so that they could go shopping for the things they would need in the "bridal chambers." Chun-hsing and Fu-chuan had already converted some of the "fruits" they got from land distribution into cash, and they went forth happily toward the Seven Star Slope.

The street certainly looked different. Formerly, the peasants were only there to sell, and now scores of them could be seen, with baskets on their arms, negotiating to buy fish and ham for the New Year. The restaurant "Home of Spring" which only catered to the landlords in the past now advertised

its "economic meals" to appeal to the peasants. Newly-made implements piled up in the blacksmith shops, with name tags pasted on them of the people who had sent in the orders. Six new cotton-bowing machines from Hsiangtan were being operated in the four cotton stores. An atmosphere of ease and prosperity enveloped the whole street. When Fu-chuan and Chun-hsing entered Chou Jui'hsiang's department store to buy some towels and a wash basin, they saw quite a number of people from other villages who seemed also to be on the lookout for various things. Thought Chung-hsing, "Strange, is everybody getting married?"

At the west end of the street a new store had just opened—in many ways entirely different from the other stores. A placard told the passers-by that it was the "Mobile Section of the Hunan Trade Company." The attendants of this state-owned enterprise had on light-blue uniforms. The way it did business was a pleasant surprise to the peasants. In the past the peasants had to sell their by-products at an impossibly low price to the merchants, from whom again they had to buy in industrial products at a high price. The Mobile Section bought in pig bristles, eggs, tea and tobacco leaves. Being free from middlemen's exploitation it was in a position to offer better prices, frequently 30 or 40 per cent higher than what peasants could get from the shops. At the same time it sold all kinds of equipment for production to the peasants, including things like new-model implements, refined cotton and chemical fertilisers, at a low price.

What pleased Fu-chuan and Chun-hsing most was a copy of the eagerly-awaited "Elementary Reader," which they picked up at a Rural Branch Office of the *Hsinhua* Bookstore. Among other things they also bought an exercise-book and a pencil for each of them, and then the crowning touch—a coloured portrait of Chairman Mao.

Li Ta-ming and Yueh-lien, who had gone to the Shihchia Village Co-operative Store instead, also came back with armfuls of packages. In addition, they brought back some of the co-op's publicity pamphlets. From them, the peasants learnt that already over 2,000 farmhands, poor and middle peasants had joined the co-op, and that with the conclusion of land reform they would develop further and take in all the nine villages of the *hsiang*. Landlords and rich peasants were, however, excluded. Each share cost only one *tou* of grain, and arrangements could be made for payment in installments. Yueh-lien then mentioned how much things like soap, candles, oil, homespun cloth and salt cost there, and the prices were really cheap. "The co-op is the place to go if you want to get good things and cheap," commented some of the peasants.

At the general call sent out by the *hsiang* Association to make redoubled efforts at hoeing, fertilising and threshing, the Hsinlu Village Production Committee also got busy organising Mutual-aid Small Groups. Benefiting from the experience of the peasants of North China, they spontaneously co-operated in their production work, thus solving the problem of the shortage of implements, draught animals and labour power. The way they did it was by passing out bamboo chips, one hundred to a family. Each unit of full-term labour was worth ten chips, half-term labour, five chips. The payment for full-term labour was six catties of grain. Each unit of animal labour was reckoned as four and a half units of human labour. Accounts were settled once every five days and at the end of each month, they would make a general clearance.

To meet the growing demand for fertiliser during the period for spring cultivation, the Production Committee was making plans for collecting 150 *tan* of grain and setting up a lime factory so that fertiliser could be mass-produced.

The 'Blackboard News' announced the "production plans" made by the various families in Hsinlu Village. Young people who were strong would repair the dyke and cultivate their own land. If there was still time left, they would go far into the hills to work at reclaiming wasteland. Older men would weed, sweep leaves and sift and store up fertiliser, and older women could spin yarn, make shoes and sandals and look after chickens and pigs.

One thing had caused a good deal of comment among the villagers: so far there had been no trace of production plans for Fu-chuan and Li Ta-ming, two of the most generally admired activists.

An idea had occurred to lots of peasants while pondering over their production plans. Why couldn't we also write to Chairman Mao and tell him about our emancipation just as the two couples were doing? Our improved livelihood, our plan for tomorrow—surely these were things we should let Chairman Mao know.

Schoolmaster Peng Kuo-chang was the one to whom most people turned. Everyday over a dozen "letters" would be handed to him many of which were actually scraps of paper with a barely intelligible sentence or two, the stationery as well as the handwriting showed a tremendous variety. Some of them contained very detailed homely information like what they would plant on their newly-acquired land and how family discord (especially among in-laws) was smoothed out after land distribution.

It was Uncle Kuang-lin who remarked wisely that they should ask Peng Kuo-chang to incorporate everybody's ideas into one composite whole. Eyeing the sheaves and sheaves of letters on the table, he said, "We have hundreds of thousands of villages like ours in China, don't we? If you write a letter

and I write a letter and everyone writes a letter, won't Chairman Mao get tired out?"

His idea met with general approval. Thus, in the literacy class of the night school, collaboration in letter-writing became an item of universal interest.

Each peasant stood up and told what he wanted to have put in and Peng Kuo-chang took everything down swiftly.

"Say that in the past those who could read in our village could be counted off on one hand and now many of us know over 100 characters!"

"Say this year on 'Kitchen-God Day' we had glutinous rice. We also bought two new coverlets. In the past dried potato was all we had, even on New Year's Day, and our clothes were in tatters and there was only one quilt for the whole family!"

Fu-chuan said, "Be sure to let Chairman Mao know that I wouldn't have got a wife if it hadn't been for land reform!"

"And Chun-hsing?" yelled the peasants in great glee. "You must say something too, Chun-hsing!"

When they finally got the remark out of her, Chun-hsing was already in tears. "I—I'd be a widow now if it hadn't been for Chairman Mao!"

On the morning of February 4 (the 28th of the Twelfth Moon, according to the old calendar), the two couples, accompanied by the Village Chairman Peng Yu-tang, went to the District Government to apply for their marriage licences.

A charcoal fire was burning in the District Chairman Shao Tsu-chang's office. Portraits of Chairman Mao, Commander-in-chief Chu, Vice-chairman Liu Shao-chi and Premier Chou decorated the walls. Since the District Chairman was having a meeting inside, Peng Yu-tang used the opportunity to introduce these national leaders to the four young people, who stood for a long time under each picture gaping with undisguised interest and admiration.

At last the District Chairman came out and listened to Peng Yu-tang describing the miserable past of the young couples and the courage they showed in struggling. Peng Yu-tang also took care to point out that it was during land reform that their love for each other grew.

Shao Tsu-chang then asked a few questions about their personal background and made sure that they were getting married of their own free will. Then he produced application forms from a drawer, and the young people filled in their names, age and home town. Under the heading "profession," Peng Yu-tang came to their rescue. For the men, one character sufficed, "cultivation," for the girls, similarly one character, "weaving." The forms were subsequently passed on to the Clerical Section where the licences were issued.

At this point, Hsiung Peng, the Secretary of the Communist Party's District Branch, also arrived on the scene. He congratulated the two couples and the conversation turned to their plans after marriage.

"Chun-hsing and I have already decided," Fu-chuan was the first to speak up. "We're both young. I have no family and she has only her mother. The two of them could easily support themselves by labouring. Therefore I request to be allowed to join the People's Liberation Army."

"We too have decided," said Li Ta-ming, rising from his seat. "If the People's Liberation Army wants me, as a soldier, as a cook or as anything, I'm ready to go!"

"Aren't all four of you already members of the militia?" asked Hsiung Peng.

"Yes," replied Fu-chuan. "We joined the militia to watch the landlords. Now that land reform is completed, the Peasants' Association can take care of them. We know Chiang Kai-shek is the master of the landlords, and American imperialism is the master of Chiang Kai-shek. Until their masters are overthrown, the landlords will never really behave!"

When the District Chairman and Hsiung Peng heard this, they both shook hands with each of the four young people. Hsiung remarked, "I'm sure what the People's Liberation Army needs are just such emancipated peasants like yourselves, courageous, loyal, and with a high level of political consciousness."

When the young couples returned, they were met at the ferry place by the entire militia body. The dyke-repairers also quit early, and, carrying implements on their shoulders, they trailed behind the two couples to the Peng-Chu Homestead. On the way everybody sang songs.

In front of the temple, once more a platform was put up. Red scrolls on either side read: "Freedom in marriage!" and "Companions in revolution!" Even the old trees on the open ground had red silk streamers tied around them. The slanting sun threw a pale golden veil over the portrait of Chairman Mao.

Amidst the music of gongs and drums and the rising and falling of harvest songs, the two couples mounted the stage. Chun-hsing and Yueh-lien had on newly-made gowns with

bright patterns. Grandma Li wore a blue silk gown with fur lining which was confiscated from some landlord. And Fu-chuan and Li Ta-ming, too, were in new blue uniforms.

Under the supervision of Peng Yu-tang, the young people put their seals on the marriage certificates. Scattered shouts came from the peasants below. "Come on, bridegrooms! Speech!"

Fu-chuan and Li Ta-ming stood up and announced, one after the other, that they were going to join the army after they got married and that their wives had consented.

In the midst of the loud applause that greeted this announcement Li Chen-nan's voice was heard. "Chairman, I want to join too!" A forest of arms were raised to express the same intention.

Here, Hsin-wu felt an explanation was needed, hence he went up to the stage, and the people quieted down. "Peasant comrades! It's good that so many of you should want to join the Liberation Army after you have been emancipated through land reform. This shows that not only has land reform broken the economic chains of us peasants but it has also stimulated our patriotism. It has made us see that the motherland belongs to us all and it is up to us to defend it.

"Yet, joining the Liberation Army impulsively without careful deliberation beforehand isn't right either. I would like to ask those who demand to enlist in the Liberation Army to study the examples of these two newly-married couples. They have been discussing this since the day of the Emancipation Meeting and have got everything finally settled. They know how to carry on production alongside with their enlistment, since production work is just as important as national defence.

"After you have thoroughly considered this matter, if you still think you should join, then the Association and the Village Government will certainly recommend you, provided you're in good health and have the consent of your family."

There was another wave of applause.

The next one to go up was Peng Kuo-chang. After he had carefully unrolled a sheet of paper, he addressed the audience: "During the last ten days or so, lots of people in our village, the old as well as the young, have offered to write to Chairman Mao. Now I have collected all of your ideas and have put them together in one letter. I have tried to keep your original remarks but avoided repetitions. Let me take this good opportunity to read it aloud to you. If there are things you don't approve, say so and we'll change them. If everything is all



The letter to Chairman Mao was read

right, we'll stamp and address the envelope and in five or six days, Chairman Mao will have it in Peking!"

Immediately everybody became quiet and attentive. This was their letter, therefore of the utmost importance. In a clear and resonant voice, Peng Kuo-chang started to read, articulating each word clearly:

"Our Beloved Chairman Mao, Saviour of the Chinese People:

"We are peasants of Hsinlu Village, Huilung hsiang. We are writing to you to express our thanks for the emancipation you helped us obtain and also to report to you on our future plans.

"There are still in our village people who can remember the year 1927 when you led us in a bitter struggle against the reactionary warlords and landlords. Later on, you were forced to leave because the dirty swine, Chiang Kai-shek, betrayed the revolution, and a period of utter darkness began to come upon us. On the one hand, the landlords took staggering rents from us, on the other, we had to pay taxes and provide manpower to meet all kinds of impossible demands from a reactionary government. For over 20 years, we rice-growers had not been able to taste one grain of rice. We subsisted entirely on dried potato strips. Our clothes were shot through with holes and a pair of sandals were a great luxury to us. In the night, we slept together with draught animals in damp and filthy barns. Our life was not even on a par with that of some kinds of animals, and all the time open to the threat of Chiang Kai-shek.

"In August 1949 you came back. That is to say, the Army and cadres you led and trained came back. To us

peasants, that was like coming upon an oasis in a desert or seeing a withered tree bursting forth in bloom. Needless to say, the landlords still had fond dreams of another 'comeback', and among ourselves there were not lacking backward elements who shied away from struggling against the landlords and blamed everything instead on 'fate'. Finally, however, all of us woke up, and once we are awakened, we know how to struggle relentlessly.

"For the last 30 years, you and those under your leadership have led the Chinese people in their determined struggle to free China from its semi-colonial fetters and now we have our first taste of happiness. We owe all this entirely to you. With your shining example and the example of the Communist Party before us, we have come to see that all the talk about 'fate' and 'horoscope' has no truth at all.

"Your instruction has helped us to change our fate. Our village has now carried through land reform, wiped out the feudal system of exploitation and cut apart the chains of slavery. We can now stand up erect and be the masters of our village.

"We want especially to tell you about two marriages: between Fu-chuan and Chun-hsing, Li Ta-ming and Yieh-lien. All four are members of the militia. The bridegrooms both used to be farmhands without a sheng of land or a roof above them that they could call their own. Now each has got some land, a house and a wife. Chun-hsing used to be a child-bride, and Yueh-lien a maid-servant. Both were direct victims of feudal society. And now both have got land and houses of their own and have chosen their own life companions of their free will.

"There are altogether 192 families in our village, of which 115 were families of landless or almost landless farmhands or

poor peasants before land reform. After we carried out land reform, we got from the landlords 82 tan and seven tou of marshy land, 12 tan and five tou of dry land, 45 farm implements, six oxen, 52 rooms both big and small, and over 4,000 catties of surplus foodstuffs. In the past, both the land beneath our feet and the roof over our heads belonged to others, we dared not complain or shed tears. Now we have our own houses and our own land, and a prosperous future is well in sight.

"Now that a breathing spell is given us economically, we have also thought of studying culture. Since the beginning of class differentiation, everyone in our village has begun to learn to read. Now we can tell you with pride that, except for children under five, everybody in our village can at least write his own name. Some have mastered as many as 300 characters. It's a momentous achievement and the starting point of the development of our peasant culture. We shall go steadily on and on, the sky is the limit.

"We understand that these changes have only become possible with the liberation of the whole nation. Only with a government of our own could we have obtained the present conditions. We realise that the future success of the nation rests largely on our efforts at production and in protecting the people's democratic dictatorship in the rural areas. We also realise that the consolidation of national security is indispensable to the effective protection of our hard-won victory.

"Therefore we have decided to devote all our power to repairing dykes and water-gates and cultivating and fertilising the land, so that in the coming autumn we can bring in a bumper harvest to repay your goodness and help strengthen our nation economically.

"In national defence, we shall also play our part, whether as local militia, volunteers or as fighters of the Liberation Army. We fully realise that national defence is the first condition for safeguarding the fruits of our anti-feudal struggle and for consolidating our victory.

"There is a lot else we might tell you. We are planning to build a school of our own. We will soon have our own co-op. A medical clinic will soon be established near the Seven Star slope. We have also heard that the 'vet' in town will soon come around with a whole team of medical workers to help immunise our animals against diseases.

"After the autumn harvest the women in the village plan to open a weaving factory with the financial backing of the co-op. We are convinced our days will become steadily better and better. Today is but the beginning of a yet more glorious tomorrow.

"We know if we really cherish our happiness, we should persist in the Resist-America-and-Aid-Korea Campaign until we have completely overthrown the enemies to our happiness—American imperialism and its lackey, Chiang Kai-shek.

"Hence, we peasants of Hsinlu Village have solemnly undertaken to do the following things:

"One, repair all dykes and water-gates, step up spring cultivation and increase the production of foodstuffs.

"Two, enlarge and strengthen the organisation of the Peasants' Association and the militia. Heighten our vigilance against counter-revolutionary elements and strengthen public security.

Three, support whole-heartedly the campaign to resist America and aid Korea with material and manpower and carry on the revolution to a victorious end.

"We wish you:

"Unbreakable health like the rock's and

"Eternal brightness like the sun's.

(Signed by)

The whole body of Hsinlu Village peasants

February 4, 1951."

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